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ABSTRACT

This document contains the 10 quarterly issues of "Rural Matters: The Rural Challenge News," published from Fall 1997 to Winter 2000 (the final issue). This newsletter focused on projects funded by the Annenberg Rural Challenge, as well as research summaries and opinion pieces on the benefits of small schools, place-based education, and community involvement in education. As the grant-making activities of the Rural Challenge came to an end and were superseded by an advocacy focus, the organization changed its name to the Rural School and Community Trust and relocated to Washington, D.C. Feature articles include: "Policy Matters: Large Schools Work against Poor Students" (Marty Strange); "In Rural Alaska, Elders Pass On to Children a 'Way of Knowing'" (Linda Martin); "Deep Discounts for Rural Schools on Telecommunications, Internet" (Vicki Hobbs); "'Circles of Wisdom' Joins Other New Rural Challenge Partners"; "Does Consolidation Deny Rural Kids Equal Access?" (Marty Strange); "'Wise Villages' Link Adults and Children in Real-Life Learning" (Toni Haas); "Court Deals Blow to Rural Schools, but Leaves Hope" (Marty Strange); "Resources at the Ready for Rural Community Connections" (Marylyn Wentworth); "School Project Grows To Support Community's Maritime Livelihood" (Julie Bartsch, Bill Clark, Gloria Jenkins); "Communities Should Own Their Standards, Rural Folk Say On Line" (John Eckman); "'A Lamb at School' Spells Learning for 75 Navajo Children" (Jane Lockard); "West Virginian Rachel Tompkins To Lead Rural Challenge into New Era"; and "$1.5 Million Lyndhurst Grant Will Help Rural Schools, Communities." (SV)

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Rural Matters: The Rural Challenge News, 1997-2000.

Fall 1997 - Winter 2000

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The Rural Challenge News Fall 1997

Schools serving their communities, communities serving their schools

Policy Matters: Large Schools Work Against Poor Students

by Marty Strange

With just 77 students, 65 of whom qualify for free or reduced price lunches, the Witts Springs K–12 school district is Arkansas's smallest. It is tucked away in the beautiful but rugged Ozark mountains, the kind of place most Americans think of as "isolated" and only see in vacation travelogues or dark movies about evil backwoods rogues. The school's twelve teachers work in a cluster of small buildings anchored by a 62-year-old stone schoolhouse built in the Depression by the WPA. The kids travel daily through the district's 143 craggy square miles.

> *"Rather than adequately and equitably fund small schools, legislators are inclined to consolidate them."*

It's the kind of school a lot of people think of as an anachronism that is holding back American education and ought to go. A lot of wrong people.

Despite their poverty, isolation, and aging facilities, Witts Springs students score well above average in standardized tests. In fact, the seventh graders as a group rank second in the state, and meet the Lake Wobegon standard—all scored above average. The fifth-graders missed that standard by one. The school has a computer for every two students, offers foreign language courses by satellite, and provides innovative instruction through multi-aged classrooms. (Well, they've actually been doing that for 50 years, out of necessity, before it was innovative.)

The truth is, small schools provide an atmosphere where knowing and being known breed self-respect, encourage hard work, and allow for special attention. And those factors count for a lot, especially in the battle to overcome the effects of poverty and other socioeconomic disadvantages. Not every small school is a good school, but it's often the case, as the sign in the Witts Spring school says, that "What we lack in size, we gain in pride."

In fact, research in Alaska, California, and West Virginia gives substantial evidence that school size and poverty interact to affect student achievement. Using regression analysis, these studies suggest that:

continued on next page

Some Facts about Small Schools

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Oregon recently published Kathleen Cotton's digest of 103 studies of the relationship of school size to various aspects of schooling. Among the findings:

1. *Between 1940 and 1990, the total number of elementary and secondary public schools declined 69 percent—from approximately 200,000 to 62,037—despite a 70 percent increase in the U.S. population.*

2. *The 117,108 school districts that existed in 1940 have experienced dramatic consolidation, and have decreased by 87 percent, to 15,367. The largest schools can generally be found within the largest districts.*

3. *One factor driving this long-term consolidation trend has been the desire of school administrators to make schooling "efficient," a notion borrowed from the private sector. But research has repeatedly found small schools to be superior to large schools on most measures—including school grades, test scores, honor roll membership, subject-area achievement, and assessment of higher-order thinking skills—and equal to them on the rest. This holds true for both elementary and secondary students of all ability levels and in all kinds of settings.*

From Kathleen Cotton, **"School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance,"** *Close-Up* Number 20, 1996. Portland, Oregon: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Tel. 503-275-9618; Web site: http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/10/c020.html

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continued from page one

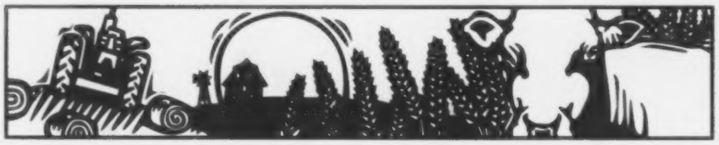
- Larger schools moderately benefit affluent students, compared to smaller schools, but they increase the negative effect of poverty on the educational achievement of poor students.
- Smaller schools substantially benefit students from poor communities, compared to larger schools, but they slightly reduce the positive effect of wealth on the achievement of affluent students;
- The benefit of small schools for poor children is much greater than the benefit of large schools for rich children.

These results apply whether the school is in an urban or rural place.

These findings suggest that large schools not only hurt poor kids, but actually increase the educational gap between wealthy and poor children.

Despite these findings, too many education leaders and policy makers still think the only good small school is a closed one. And ironically, school closings are often brought on when rural communities seek fiscal justice through school finance litigation. Rather than adequately and equitably fund small schools, legislators are inclined to consolidate them. That reduces the burden of sharing on wealthier suburban schools, but it closes a lot of good rural schools, and does nothing to relieve the burden that oversized schools place on poor children in urban areas.

The Rural Challenge will support expanded policy research and analysis in this area during the coming year. For more information, contact Marty Strange, Rural Challenge Policy Program, 51 South Pleasant St., Randolph, VT 05060, (802) 728-4383, marty.strange@connriver.net.



Comment

"Rurality" Is in the Details

by Devin Smither

I have discovered something about the Rural Challenge, but also about rural as a quality, as something that is appreciated in the aesthetic sense. The word "rural" has the connotation of having to do with America's past. It has developed a sense of anachronism, bringing an archaic image to mind. We conjure this few-toothed farmer with a piece of straw in his mouth, hoeing his crop with a red barn in the distance.

That is the general sense of the word. It is one, however, that we must not embrace. The purpose of this workshop, I believe in one sense, is to enhance the identities of the rural communities and their people. That brings me to my discovery.

It is not the general sense of the word that people are here for. It is the specific one, the one that is detailed. We are here to celebrate and encourage our own different forms of rurality. That is the entire point of our presence here, it seems to me. We are trying to keep from being swindled into believing that urbanity is the world, that it is all that matters. We are also trying to avoid a worse fate. We are saving ourselves from being sucked into the black hole that is lost identity, the belief in our uselessness. We are attempting to defy what, up until recently, seemed an eventual certainty. And it is not through our use of the word rural that we will succeed, but through our individual identities.

Think of Mexicans without tortillas, think of Alaskans without their hunting, think of Southerners without their accents. These are their details, their specific qualities. It is what makes them who they are. I believe this is how identity works. Think of a very famous

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of the Rural Challenge includes:
Paul Nachtigal and
Toni Haas (co-directors),
Betchen Wolf, and
Mike Taylor.

We welcome articles and letters for consideration but regret that we cannot return manuscripts without stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

building. There are certain portions of each one that are sharp and clear in our memory. The columns of the Parthenon, the spire of the Empire State Building, the gargoyles of the Notre Dame Cathedral—without any of these, the buildings would seem incomplete, unfinished. They would lose a part of their greatness. Just so, we shall define each part of our building, the Rural Challenge.

We must cry out in our separate voices, "We are Mexicans, we are Alaskans, we are Texans, we are Californians!" The cries of all of us will unite to tell the world, "We are important!" "We are self-sufficient!" "We are our own people!" "We are Rural!"

Let us embrace our differences, for they are the hammer and chisel that we shall form our cultures with, that we will use to carve from the block of stone that is the urban belief in superiority. These are the tools we shall use to identify ourselves. Differences, the detail, the specificity of each culture are what shall succeed. We must assure ourselves that future rural generations will feel themselves important.

It is then, and only then, that we will have met, fought, and overcome the Rural Challenge.

Devin Smither, 15, is a student at Edcouch High School, a rural district near the Texas–Mexico border that belongs to the Llana Grande Research Project, a Rural Challenge member. Devin came to the June 1997 Rural Challenge Rendezvous in Granby, Colorado; and after the first day of the conference he wrote and delivered the above address to over 300 other participants from Rural Challenge schools.

Notes

from the National Office

Welcome to the first issue of **Rural Matters: The Rural Challenge News!** *In future issues, we will use this space to reflect on our own "Challenge of the Month" and raise issues of importance to us all.*

For now, we are launching this seasonal publication with a round up of important information and connections for our partners (see pages 4 and 5), the first of what will be a regular column on policy by Board member Marty Strange (see page 1), short features on what Rural Challenge partners are doing, some recommended reading, and opinion essays and letters by some of you. (This issue's essay is by student Devin Smithers of Texas (see page 2).

Meanwhile, please send us your suggestions, articles, and feedback on Rural Matters' content and format. And don't forget to check out our Web site at www.ruralchallenge.org.

—Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal, Co-Directors

The Research and Evaluation Team for the Rural Challenge, headed by Vito Perrone at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, gathered with local site researchers from Alaska, Appalachia, Alabama, Texas, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Oregon at our Summer Rendezvous in July 1997. These people collect and document the stories of rural communities and their schools, listening and learning about the uniqueness of rural places in the United States. From left: Dick Landry (South Dakota), Connie Titone (Appalachia Renewal Project), Lauren Sosniak (Tillamook Consortium, Oregon), Robert Leier (PACERS, Alabama), Harvard research assistant Carla Fontaine, project director Vito Perrone, Harvard administrative assistant Amber Mayes, Scott Christian (Alaska Rural Initiative), and Miles Bryant (School at the Center, Nebraska). In front: Harvard project administrator Evangeline Stefanakis, and research assistants Mary Casey and Julie Canniff. Absent (but always present): research assistant Ben Williams.

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Funded Partners in the Rural Challenge

Planning Grants

Common Ground Foundation
George Wood
22 Franklin Ave., P.O. Box 215
Amesville, OH 45711
Phone and fax: (614) 448-2314

Kickapoo Environmental Studies Institute
James Lewicki
No. Crawford Schools, Rt. 1, Box 1589
Soldiers Grove, WI 54655
Phone: (608) 735-4311
Fax: (608) 624-6269

The Land Institute
Wes Jackson, President
Matthew Logan, Director of Development
2440 E. Water Well Road
Salinas, KS 67401
Phone: (913) 823-5376
Fax: (913) 823-8726

Schleicher County Rural Challenge Committee
Ilse B. Williams
Schleicher County ISD
P.O. Box W
Eldorado, TX 76936
Phone: (915) 853-2514
Fax: (915) 853-2695

School Leadership Project Partners in Education
Faith Dunne, director
46 Shepard Street, #21
Cambridge, MA 02138
Phone: (401) 863-1294

Tenn Ga'lina Consortium
Philip L. Kiper, Principal
Van Buren County High School
P.O. Box 278
Spencer, TN 38585
Phone: (615) 946-2442

Current Grants

Alaska Federation of Natives / Rural Education Consortium
Julie E. Kitka, President
Project Directors: Dorothy Larson, Oscar Kawagley
1577 C Street, Suite 201
Anchorage, AK 99501
Phone: (907) 274-3611
Fax: (907) 276-7989

Appalachian Rural Education Network
Wimberly Royster, Director
Kentucky Science and Technology Council, Inc.
PNC Bank Plaza
200 W. Vine St., Suite 420
Lexington, KY 40507
Phone: (606) 255-3511 x 225
Fax: (606) 259-0986

Bread Loaf School of English
Jim Maddox
Middlebury College
Middlebury, VT 05753
Phone: (802) 443-5000 x 5418
Fax: (802) 338-0297

Cascade Consortium
Marcia Jesperson
Lake Chelan SD No. 129
P.O. Box 369
Chelan, WA 98816
Phone: (509) 682-7744
Fax: (509) 682-5842

Center for School Change
Joe Nathan
Hubert H. Humphrey Institute,
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301 19th Ave. South
Minneapolis, MN 55455
Phone: (612) 626-1834
Fax: (612) 625-3513

Colorado Rural Charter Schools Network
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37888 Highway 24
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Foxfire, Inc.
Bobby Ann Starnes, President
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Mountain City, GA 30562-0541
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Fax: (706) 746.5829

League of Professional Schools
Carl Glickman, Chair
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124 Algerhold Hall
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Phone: (706) 542-6551
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Llano Grande Research Project
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Edcouch-Elsa ISD, P.O. Box 127
Edcouch, TX 78538
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Fax: (210) 262-3661

Mariposa County Unified School District
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Mariposa, CA 95338
Phone: (209) 742-0250

National Writing Project
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Elyse Eidman-Aadahl, Project Director
University of California, Graduate School of Education
5511 Tolman Hall #1670
Berkeley, CA 94720-1670
Phone: (510) 642-0963
Fax: (510) 642-4545

New Paradigm Partners /Rural Challenge Project
Chuck Ericksen, Coordinator
P.O. Box 86
Tony, WI 54563
Phone: (715) 532-7760
Fax: (715) 532-5405

North Coast Rural Challenge Network
Ken Matheson, Superintendent
Mendocino Unified School District
P.O. Box 1154
Mendocino, CA 95460
Phone: (707) 937-5868
Fax: (707) 937-0714

PACERS
Program for Rural Services and Research
Jack Shelton
205 University Blvd. E.
Box 870372
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0372
Phone: (205) 348-6432
Fax: (205) 348-2412

Partnership Initiative in Rural Maine
Lynne Miller, David Ruff
117 Bailey Hall
University of Southern Maine
Gorham, ME 04038
Phone: (207) 780-5498
Fax: (207) 780-5315

Program for Rural School and Community Renewal
Mike Johnson
College of Education and Counseling
SDSU, Wenona Hall
P.O. Box 507
Brookings, SD 57005-0095
Phone: (605) 688-4198
Fax: (605) 688-6074

REAL Enterprises
Rick Larson
115 Market St., Suite 320
Durham, NC 27701
Phone: (919) 688-7325
Fax: (919) 682-7621

School at the Center
Project Directors: J. Hoffman, P. Olson, J. Walters
Center for Curriculum and Instruction
119Henzlik Hall
P.O. Box 880355
Lincoln, NE 68588
Phone: (402) 472.6395
Fax: (402) 472.8317

Selbourne Project
Larry C. Frank, Superintendent
Penny Jobe, Project Director
Warren County School District
Curwen Building
185 Hospital Drive
Warren, PA 16365-4885
Phone: (814) 723-6900
Fax: (814) 723-4244

The Southern Initiative of the Algebra Project
Dave Dennis
Positive Innovations, Inc.
P.O. Box 20658
Jackson, MS 39289
Phone: (601) 969-3198
Fax: (601) 969-3291

Texas Interfaith Education Fund
Carrie Laughlin
1106 Clayton Lane, #120 W
Austin, TX 78723
Phone: (512) 459-6551
Fax: (512) 459-6558

Tillamook Education Consortium
Ed Armstrong
6825 Officers Row
Tillamook, OR 97141
Phone: (503) 842-2558
Fax: (503) 842-6854

Vermont Alliance for School Improvement
Sue Mahoney, Project Director
Vermont Department of Education
120 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620
Phone: (802) 828-3125
Fax: (802) 828-3140

Yampa Valley Legacy Education Initiative
Cindy Simms, Superintendent
Steamboat Springs School District RE-2
Steamboat Springs, CO 80477
Phone: (970) 879-1530
Fax: (970) 879-3842

Yuba Watershed Alliance
Tonie Hilligoss
P.O. Box 185
Camptonville, CA 95922
Phone: (916) 288-3451
Fax: (916) 288-0508

Our First Partners Prove Resources for Later Ones

The first round of Rural Challenge partners were people already doing important work with a long and admirable history. Their work, in fact, helped build the Rural Challenge philosophy of education reform.

Among the first round partners are two kinds of efforts. Some specialize in particular approaches or practices, and make an excellent resource base for other Rural Challenge participants to draw on. Foxfire's approach, for example, is grounded in local cultures and ecology; REAL focuses on connecting schools with entrepreneurship and local business; Bread Loaf provides graduate training for teachers in English; Texas Interfaith works in community organizing; and the National Writing Project links student and teacher writers who are deeply connected to local places.

Also in the first round of grantees are those whose work demonstrates important principles in rural education reform. These include the Alaska Federation of Natives' Rural Education Consortium, the Center for School Change in Minnesota, the League of Professional Schools in Georgia, the PACERS Cooperative in Alabama, the Program for Rural School and Community Renewal in South Dakota, the Partnership for Rural Maine, the School at the Center project in Nebraska, the School Leadership Project, and the Southern Initiative of the Algebra Project.

All these partners welcome inquiries from each other and the dozen sites funded in subsequent rounds. For names, addresses, and contact information, see page 4; for more information on all sites, see our student-run Web site at *www.ruralchallenge.org*.

Foxfire: A Wealth of Experience Grown from Years of Effort

Judy Bryson's fourth grade students at Wallins Creek Elementary School in Harlan County, Kentucky, researched the area's old-growth Blanton Forest, including writing plays set in the forest, collecting money to expand its protected parts, and taking the whole school to their own Forest museum.

Judy has been working with Foxfire for ten years, and this was a classic Foxfire project: she facilitated the students' active learning, infusing learner choice, design and revision at every stage. The connections with the community were clear and important; the audience was public and deeply engaged; and the students' imagination and creativity came into play throughout.

It was a prime example of the kind of work the Rural Challenge looked for in choosing, as its first-round partners, groups whose work

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PACERS Weaves Small Schools, Rural Communites in Revitalization Effort

The PACERS cooperative began 20 years ago as a network of small schools in rural Alabama, working together to share information, training, programs, and documentation efforts. Its program "Better Schools, Better Communities" received a major boost when Rural Challenge support arrived in June 1996; the number of projects in schools increased from 75 to 125 in the next year.

PACERS has come far in using information technology to connect students, teachers, and community members. Supported by local business partnerships, its computer network (www.pacers.org) serves as a resource for distance learning and an interactive forum for discussions on school change. Alabama requires schools to become networked, so this support for underfunded rural schools is crucial.

Another initiative, the Rural Institute, brings schools to the table to think through long-term strategies for better schools and stronger communities. Links with other Rural Challenge partners are developing: two PACERS high schools made presentations at a League of Professional Schools conference.

In geographic clusters, PACERS encourages schools to document, interpret, and evaluate their work. This has included displays mount-

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From Hunting to Gathering: Scouts into Stewards

The hard-working Rural Challenge scouts who helped find and coach our participating sites have now turned to another task: nurturing the work in those sites so as to best reflect the Rural Challenge philosophy.

When the Rural Challenge began in 1995, the Board of Directors was determined to invest most of its funds in great *work*. We wanted to identify rural schools and communities where students are known by caring adults in small settings, then create a living laboratory of such projects to inspire people all over the country to rethink the meaning of education. We were looking to fund places that saw schools as public institutions, serving and served by their communities. We were looking for people working together on learning and developing the capacity to live well in a place, acting on the belief that every person contributes to our shared future, and connecting to local culture and ecology.

> *“We wanted to identify exemplary rural schools and communities, then create a living laboratory of such projects.”*

This was to be a focused grants program, so the Board decided to consider only proposals solicited through invitations. That meant hunting out new sites—going to places, meeting people, taking their measure and letting them take ours. The people we hired to do this we called our “scouts.”

After eighteen months in the field, those scouts have found wonderful work; we have funded a dozen schools and communities and have begun relationships with almost three times that many.

Our scouts have also found many fine people doing great work that doesn't fit our grants program, but who share our philosophy and dedication to healthy schools and vibrant communities. And they have found others who might join us, but haven't had the chance to have in their home places crucial conversations about what education is for. In our next phase, we will ask our scouts to become “stewards,” gathering these folks together and pooling their energy in a social movement for education reform rooted in strong community life.

Eight stewards, each assigned a region of the country, will be connecting the Rural Challenge partners with one another and drawing others into the conversation as well. Their “letters from the field” will appear regularly here; and they can be contacted at the addresses below or on the Web at *www.ruralchallenge.org*.

Julie Bartsch is steward for the Northeast, including Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey. She is liaison with Program Rural Initiative in Maine and the Vermont Rural Alliance, and can be reached at 127 Bare Hill Road, Bolton, MA 01740; (978) 779-2863; or bartsch@meol.mass.edu.

Deloris Pringle is steward for Southern Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, coastal Virginia, coastal North Carolina, coastal South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. She is liaison with Bread Loaf School of English, the League of Professional Schools, REAL, the Southern Initiative of the Algebra Project, and PACERS. Deloris can be reached at 41 Marietta St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30303; by phone at (404) 893-0100 and fax at (404) 577-7812; or by e-mail at dpringle@mindspring.com.

Barbara Poore coordinates the work of the stewards. Her region includes western Pennsylvania, northern Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota. She is liaison with the Selbourne Project, the National Writing Project sites in Pennsylvania and Nebraska, School at the Center, and the Program for School and Community Renewal. Barbara can be reached at 6953 Copper Mountain Court, Indianapolis, IN 46236; by phone at (317) 823-1481 or fax at (317) 823-7017, and by e-mail at bpoore5586@aol.com.

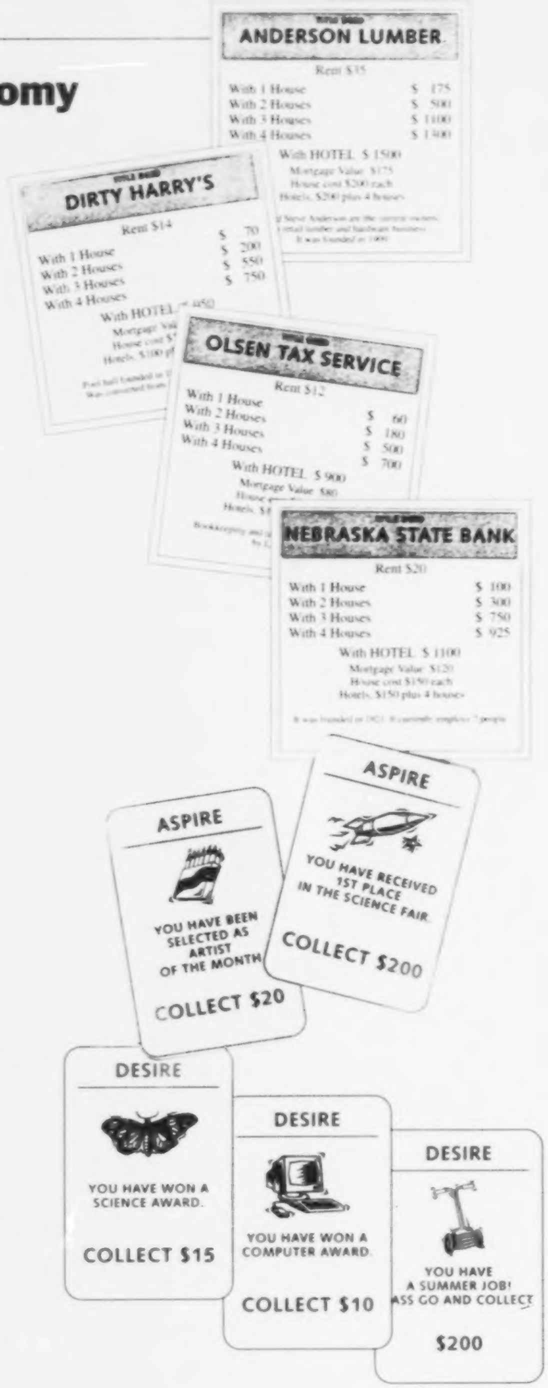
Elaine Salinas's region includes the Upper Midwest and Native American sites: Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Alaska. She is liaison with New Paradigm Partners, the Michigan site of the National Writing Project, the Center for School Change, and the Alaska Federation of Natives. Elaine can be reached at 3097 Open Gate Trail, Green Bay, WI 54313; by phone at (920) 497-5850 (x 5046); by fax at (920) 497-5848; and by e-mail: esali62092@aol.com.

Sylvia Parker's region changes this year to the Northwest: Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, and Northern California. She serves as liaison to the Colorado Rural Charter School Network, the Cascade Consortium, Tillamook, the Washington site of the National Writing Project, and, in Northern California, the North Coast Rural Challenge Network, Mariposa County, and the Yuba Watershed project. Sylvia can be reached at 1631 Trailwood Drive, Fort Collins, CO 80525; by phone or fax at (970) 482-9572; and by e-mail at Parkers@lamar.colostate.edu.

Jose Colchado covers the Southwest: Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas (in collaboration with Belle Zars). He is liaison to the New Mexico site of the National Writing Project, and the Arizona and New Mexico sites for Bread Loaf School of English. Jose is at 6520 South Avenue Don Fernando, Tucson, AZ 85746; (520) 908-0901; or e-mail Jose.Colchado@nau.edu.

Kids Play Games with the Local Economy

As part of their school's "1930's Institute," seventh- through twelfth-grade students in tiny Wakefield, Nebraska delved into the history of their town's local businesses to create their own "Wakeopoly" game, complete with rules and other lore. In the process, they learned much about the economics and history of small-town enterprise. At right, their research shows up in cards for the game; tokens, hotels, and houses were fashioned from found objects, just as they might have been in the Depression Era.


ANDERSON LUMBER
Rent $35
With 1 House $ 175
With 2 Houses $ 500
With 3 Houses $ 1100
With 4 Houses $ 1300
With HOTEL $ 1500
Mortgage Value $175
House cost $200 each
Hotels, $200 plus 4 houses
DIRTY HARRY'S
Rent $14
With 1 House $ 70
With 2 Houses $ 200
With 3 Houses $ 550
With 4 Houses $ 750
OLSEN TAX SERVICE
Rent $12
With 1 House $ 60
With 2 Houses $ 180
With 3 Houses $ 500
With 4 Houses $ 700
With HOTEL $ 900
Mortgage Value $80
NEBRASKA STATE BANK
Rent $20
With 1 House $ 100
With 2 Houses $ 300
With 3 Houses $ 750
With 4 Houses $ 925
With HOTEL $ 1100
Mortgage Value $120
House cost $150 each
Hotels, $150 plus 4 houses
ASPIRE
YOU HAVE BEEN SELECTED AS ARTIST OF THE MONTH
COLLECT $20
ASPIRE
YOU HAVE RECEIVED 1ST PLACE IN THE SCIENCE FAIR
COLLECT $200
DESIRE
YOU HAVE WON A SCIENCE AWARD.
COLLECT $15
DESIRE
YOU HAVE WON A COMPUTER AWARD.
COLLECT $10
DESIRE
YOU HAVE A SUMMER JOB! PASS GO AND COLLECT
$200

Telling Our Stories: Harvard-Led Team Will Document the Work

The "Wakeopoly" game described on this page is just one of the stories and artifacts gathered by the research and evaluation team for the Rural Challenge. Located at Harvard University and directed by Vito Perrone, professor of education, the four-year longitudinal project will use stories of rural people and their learning environments to document and evaluate the success of our long-term effort.

Among other things, the effort stands out because it is so decentralized, depending on research assistants throughout the country as well as a core staff at Harvard University. (See picture, page 3.)

Drawing on the multiple perspectives of researchers, practitioners, and community members, it will provide a rich mix of data about the learning taking place both in and out of school. These stories and information will be useful not only at the end of four years, when the team summarizes the achievements of the Rural Challenge, but along the way as it helps to shape the efforts of communities and schools. Finally, the findings may shed light on the national school reform movement as well.

The first year, project administrator Evangeline Stefanakis notes, was spent organizing this complex and challenging research effort and establishing its new quarters at 14 Story Street, Cambridge, MA 02138 (telephone: 617-495-5191). More about the project and its work will appear in coming issues of *Rural Matters*.

Stewards *continued*

Belle Zars is steward for Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. She serves as liaison with Texas Interfaith, Llana Grande Research Project, and the Arkansas site of the Bread Loaf School of English. Belle is at 7309 Bucknell Drive, Austin, TX 78723; phone (512) 927-9855; fax (512) 927-1411; and e-mail at mbzars@aol.com.

Robert Gipe is now working at the Appalachian Studies Center at Southeast Community College, but will continue with some Rural Challenge projects. We are actively recruiting a new Appalachian steward, whose responsibilities will include Tennessee, Western Kentucky, West Virginia, Western Virginia, and Southern Ohio, as well as a liaison role with ARSI. Robert can be reached at PO Box 563, Cumberland, KY 40823 or at (606) 589-2145, extension 2047.

The stewards are assisted in their work by **Bruce Miller** and **Doug Thomas**.

Foxfire, continued from page 5

could inform, illustrate, and build the Rural Challenge philosophy of schools serving their communities and communities serving their schools. Yet when the national *Challenge Journal* newsletter included a brief description of Bryson's work in a list of projects from Rural Challenge schools, it forgot to mention Foxfire's key role, creating the mistaken impression that the work received direct support from Rural Challenge funds. (In fact, Judy Bryson's Foxfire work receives support from many sources, including the Blanton Forest Trust, the county and state, and Forward in the Fifth, an area educational organization.)

This correction has special importance because the public needs to understand that meaningful, sustainable school change takes many years of groundwork, support, and planning before it bears fruit like Judy Bryson's work. "Those of us engaged in the community of school change know that the work is tedious, time-consuming, and anything but a quick fix," notes Bobby Ann Starnes, Foxfire's president.

In eleven affiliated networks around the country and through a host of other support services for districts, schools, and individual teachers, Foxfire supports teachers who complete its introductory course and are using the Foxfire approach in their classrooms. These networks and many other participants are working with the national Foxfire office toward a growing vision of Foxfire as a whole school united by eleven "core practices."

In addition, Foxfire has partnered with other Rural Challenge members to advance a common vision of learning with roots in the community. On the Pine Ridge Reservation in isolated Shannon County, South Dakota, the school district and Foxfire are working with the Program for Rural School and Community Renewal to help build sustainable local programs that support teacher, school, and community development.

"The partners' work fits together," teacher Barb Blaney told the *Foxfire News*, "so our work is not fragmented, as happens so often. It feels like we are all in this together, we all share a vision. That is an important and unusual occurrence."

PACERS, continued from page 5

ed in the Birmingham Museum of Art; an award-winning album of rural voices co-sponsored by Smithsonian's Folkways label; and projects that mix math and science skills with local development, such as student-constructed solar houses, greenouses, fisheries, and outdoor classrooms and labs. Music workshops, photography projects, and community history efforts in print and video have all been supported by Rural Challenge funds.

One of the most far-reaching projects has helped support student-launched local newspapers in 19 PACERS communities. Mentored by journalism students from the University of Alabama who receive credit for their work, the newspapers staff, teachers, and public share information and discussions through an electronic home page called "The Front Porch." Several newspapers enjoy wide circulation among alumni throughout the country, and they provide a critical source of local news to their communities.

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rural matters

The Rural Challenge News
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The Rural Challenge News Winter 1998

Schools serving their communities, communities serving their schools

In Rural Alaska, Elders Pass On to Children a 'Way of Knowing'

by Linda Martin

The Inupiat people of Alaska have the custom of speaking to a newborn child words they would like that child to grow up and emulate. If they want her to be thoughtful and wise, in her first days of life they speak to her words of wisdom and knowing. In something of the same way, our culture dictates how we learn, who we are, and what we will become.

Recent research has shown that some students learn best through seeing things, others through sound and music, and still others through touching and manipulating objects. But beyond individual learning styles, the learning community in which people grow shapes how they learn from infancy onward.

> *“Students learn native languages, medicine, making, geography—and also respect and tribal responsibility.”*

With that in mind, the Alaska Native / Rural Challenge aims to shift the cultural and educational focus in schools from teaching *about* the local culture to teaching *in* that culture. This Rural Challenge partner seeks to reorient schools so that they use indigenous knowledge systems, ways of knowing, and world views as the foundation for teaching all subjects.

As part of this shift in educational focus, community elders are working with schools and students to share the knowledge, wisdom, and experience of centuries. They teach young students native languages, medicine, trap making, parka making, geography, storytelling, dance, measurements, and a respect for the environment.

Within this indigenous cultural context, students learn not only the "basics" taught in every school, but also community values of respect and tribal responsibility. The depth that comes with this learning often does not happen when a Western world view is imposed upon a culture that does not share that tradition and history.

The Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (ARSI) became a partner in the Rural Challenge in 1996. Before that, in cooperation with the Alaska Federation of Natives and the University of Alaska, it received a grant from the National Science Foundation with a focus on math and science. This new

continued on next page

Two World Views: Indigenous, Western

In their 1992 publication Wisdom of the Elders, *Knudtson and Suzuki describe some of the differences between the indigenous Native world view and a Western world view, as follows:*

Indigenous: *Spirituality is imbedded in all elements of the cosmos.*
Western: *Spirituality is centered in a single Supreme Being.*
Indigenous: *Humans have responsibility for maintaining harmonious relationship with the natural world.*
Western: *Humans exercise dominion over nature to use it for personal and economic gain.*
Indigenous: *Universe is made up of dynamic, ever-changing natural forces.*
Western: *Universe is made up of an array of static physical objects.*
Indigenous: *Time is circular with natural cycles that sustain all life.*
Western: *Time is a linear chronology of "human progress."*
Indigenous: *Nature is honored routinely through daily spiritual practice.*
Western: *Spiritual practices are intermittent and set apart from daily life.*
Indigenous: *Respect for elders is based on their compassion and reconciliation of outer- and inner-directed knowledge.*
Western: *Respect for others is based on material achievement and chronological old age.*
Indigenous: *Sense of empathy and kinship with all forms of life.*
Western: *Sense of separateness from and superiority over other forms of life.*

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partnership with the Rural Challenge enables ARSI to develop a well-rounded curriculum, including language arts and social studies.

Across Cultures, Regions

Five regional initiatives are part of the ARSI effort: Oral Tradition as Education; Language and Cultural Immersion Camps; Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and the Subsistence Economy; Living in Place; and Reclaiming Tribal Histories. These initiatives, which take place on a rotating schedule over five years, are organized into five clusters of effort, each the focus of a year's activity in one of the five major cultural regions: Yup'ik, Inupiaq, Athabascan, Akleut /Alutiiq and Tlingit/Haida.

As well as the regional initiatives, statewide and national initiatives will operate in all five regions for five years. The statewide efforts develop curriculum resources that use multimedia and telecommunications technology, in connection with the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (on the Web at www.uaf.alaska.edu/ankn). The national initiative has developed a Native American / Rural Education Network, working with other Rural Challenge partners to share information, promote reform, and extend opportunities in rural education.

Teaching in the culture works. If we speak to children in their native language and tradition, they grow to possess qualities that help foster that tradition. They know who they are, where they come from, and what they can become. We learn best in the true context of our life; the individual as well as the learning community grows. The Alaska Native / Rural Challenge is helping that growth to happen.

Notes

from the National Office

Together we've made great developmental steps in all four of the Rural Challenge program areas: grants, policy, public engagement, and evaluation. Our policy program, masterminded by Marty Strange, is sponsoring research. One example is the Matthew Project, analyzing data from several states, that tests the hypothesis that students from low-income families achieve more in small schools. The Board just approved Marty's plan to enlarge the policy program into four distinct, but inter-related initiatives in standards and assessments, equity and efficiency, infrastructure, and governance.

Public engagement works to build a social movement, changing America's conversation about rural schools and communities. It will be the focus of our work over the next year. Our partners have told us how the Rural Challenge can make connections that deepen and strengthen work at sites and the work we can undertake together. Those ideas, suggestions, and dreams will become our public engagement plan. The Board (and staff including stewards) will hold a strategic planning session in mid-February, covering the next three to seven years and the Rural Challenge after the Annenberg Foundation contract expires.

Field staff are making the crucial transition from scouts to stewards with wit, intelligence, and grace. As of this writing, we have seven stewards (we're recruiting for the Appalachian position) and have heard enthusiastic kudos from the partners, saying that the stewards' expanded role as linkers and technical assistants is helpful. Regional energy is emerging. We are beginning to plan next summer's meeting (June 25 to 27 back in Granby). Check out the Web site (www.ruralchallenge.org) for how you can be involved in helping create the agenda.

The evaluation team's report of our first two years is full of insight about how hard a challenge we've set, and how difficult it is to move to schools as public institutions, fully enmeshed in the lives of their communities. They conclude that, together, we've made a

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rural matters

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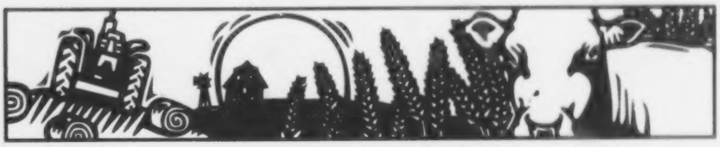
We welcome articles and letters for consideration but regret that we cannot return manuscripts without stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

Web site: www.ruralchallenge.org



Comment

Tales from the Rural Trail

by Belle Zars

It may be the Southwest ear or some remnant of speech impairment I carry, but I find that not many people hear and understand me when I say "rural." "World?" they ask. "Whirl Challenge?"

No, I explain, *rural*—as in "out in the country." Is it my accent? Over the almost two years I have been a scout for the Rural Challenge I have practiced rolling my *r*'s, but the word remains uncommon in these parts, carrying a faint whiff of the British.

And I have learned that many people from out in the brush have a shortage of rural pride and rural self-awareness: they simply see themselves as "not urban," "not suburban." Little communities are "out there"—say, 200 miles west of San Antonio.

Defining yourself by what you are *not* creates a vacuum in a community. But beyond that, and for many reasons, I sense a growing feeling that "rural" may be too pure a word for many people's experience of the part of the country where they find themselves. Some rural areas, especially in Texas and Arkansas, are changing quickly. I ask myself every day, is this rural? Here are a few recent dilemmas.

In Oklahoma I visited a district perched on a fast and busy two-lane highway. Everybody seemed to be going somewhere else in a hurry. The superintendent had been there for two years; he loved to ride motorcycles and had found the district while he was out biking. In honor of my visit he went down to the little grocery at the side of the road and asked if anyone knew how the settlement got its name. Someone thought it was named after a woman, but no one was quite sure. Everyone I met at the community meeting had moved there from somewhere else, most often to retire.

In Texas I visited a district where almost all the parents commute at least 45 minutes to jobs in a plastics factory in a small city on the interstate. People thought long and hard before they could name a family that still earns a living from agriculture. Just ten years ago, they told me, most families farmed at least enough to contribute substantially to the family's income. Only a few of the teachers live in this district. (As one of them said, "You have to drive out to the city to get milk or a loaf of bread anyway, why not just make one trip and be home.") Rumor had it that a big developer was planning to turn hundreds of acres of milo into a subdivision of country homes.

Another Texas district, about 50 miles from a medium-sized city, was dotted with signs advertising cul-de-sac communities with names like Stoney Brook, Oak Pointe, and Rolling Hills Estates. I saw more sport utility vehicles than farm trucks, more Volvos than Chevys. The principal and the superintendent still sported fine Stetson hats and big belt buckles, but they had a faraway look in their eyes when we talked about rural matters.

In another school I visited, in a very small and isolated community along the Texas-Mexico border, none of the teachers and very few of the parents had grown up there. It was so beautiful and untouched that it had become a mecca for survivalists, artists, and aging hippies. They had helped to create a thriving tourist business, selling access to the scenery and capitalizing on the low-wage labor of recent immigrants from Mexico.

In a little district in Arkansas, poor and predominantly African-American, I asked the largely white teaching staff where they lived. Not one lived in the district:

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Belle Zars, the Rural Challenge's steward for Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana.

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Reconstructing Hope: The School at the Center

High school students in Wakefield, Nebraska will soon become part of the solution to their small community's housing problems. In a new modular technology lab provided by funds from the local Gardner Family Foundation, they are working out plans and proposals using the latest architectural drawing computers, an electricity module, and a digital video editing lab.

The effort demonstrates two major focuses of the School at the Center project, a Rural Challenge partnership that includes eighteen schools in eight communities across this state. Reconstructing local housing and historic buildings is a key aim of the initiative, as is using technology to join adults and students in community revitalization efforts. It also seeks to develop micro-enterprises, to repair the local environments, and to explore and continue towns' artistic and historic heritages.

Wakefield's business students, for instance, are researching local business, looking for gaps that entrepreneurs might address, from a bed-and-breakfast to a mobile tractor repair service. A community support team provides legal input, business planning help, banking advice, public relations assistance, and marketing advice.

In Palmer, Nebraska, eight students will help rehabilitate seven houses over the next three years, increasing the town's tax base and providing community housing for elderly and low-income citizens. Local contractors will serve as mentors to the project, which received $103,000 in a Community Development Block Grant. Meanwhile, the high school's Modern Problems class is studying Palmer's housing needs, budgeting the rehabilitation funds, using the Internet to find out how other communities deal with housing issues, and reporting its findings at village board meetings.

The thousand or so residents of Morrill, Nebraska have had no newspaper until now, so local high school students will start one next year to serve it and three surrounding communities. They hope their reporting will celebrate both the German and the Mexican cultural identities of most local residents, bringing them together in community development.

Because it encompasses every level of the system—schools, state and local organizations, and policy makers—School at the Center stands out among Rural Challenge partners in its ability to exert leverage simultaneously on educational and community revitalization.

"The death of hope in many communities during the 1980s was far more devastating than the economic squeeze," School at the Center's Paul Olson told the Rural Challenge evaluation team recently. "As the teachers, administrators, and students reconstruct the buildings, businesses, art, and history of their communities, they are eventually engaged in the reconstruction of hope."

Community–School Exchange Is Theme of First Evaluation

How do schools and their communities interact? How do they share resources? How do communities support the schooling process, and schools support the development of communities? The Harvard University research and evaluation team for the Rural Challenge posed these questions in their 1997 annual report, which focused on the theme of "community–school exchange."

"Small communities are particularly well suited to incorporating the school and the work of the school within the work and values of the community," says Scott Christian, a researcher in Alaska. "Ideally it's difficult to see the boundaries between school and community when people of all ages are moving regularly between the systems of each."

That movement typically takes place on a continuum, the report observes, starting with activities that link school and community and proceeding through larger projects and finally a fuller integration of school and community. And because resources are limited and the history of rural communities includes tensions and struggle, the challenges to such integration can be formidable. "As communities and schools interact," the report observes, "they often bring differing agendas."

Establishing a common language is a good starting point, the research team suggests, and offers these "working definitions" for Rural Challenge members:

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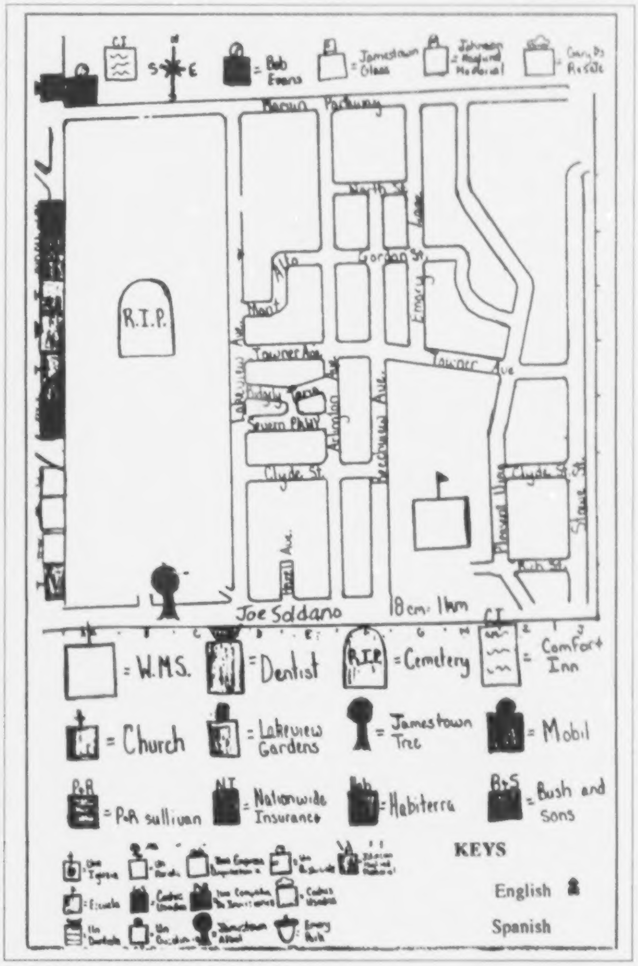
A Very Close Look at Place: The Selborne Project

"There are things around us and right at our feet that we have never seen," said Alexander Graham Bell, "because we have never really looked." Inspired by the work of an eighteenth-century English naturalist who recorded his observations of his native village of Selborne, and continuing in the tradition of Thoreau's *Walden*, the Roger Tory Peterson Institute has brought students, parents, school staff, community members, and experts together to look closely at what fills the one square kilometer around their schools. In communities along the Pennsylvania–New York border, cross-curricular study projects have unfolded that have students mapping streets, sketching local architecture as well as plant and animal life, interviewing community members, charting weather and population patterns, and investigating local cultural traditions from quilting to poetry. The environment becomes a laboratory for the study of natural and human systems and the way they interact.

Targeted first for middle school students, the curriculum appeals as well to many elementary and high schools. And community interest and participation is high, reports the Peterson Institute, which plans to launch a Selborne Web site to encourage communication and data sharing among participants, and to help the project inform authentic local issues.

Above: Student-naturalist Terry Borger collects data on the environment outside Beaty-Warren Middle School in Warren, Pennsylvania.

At right: Middle school students at Washington School in Jamestown, New York measured and mapped a square kilometer including the town's major cemetery, a small nature preserve, businesses, and residences. The project sparked work in all core subjects, including Spanish.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= W.M.S.
= Dentist
= Cemetery
= Comfort Inn
= Church
= Lakeview Gardens
= Jamestown Tree
= Mobil
= P&R sullivan
= Nationwide Insurance
= Habiterra
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Policy Matters

Deep Discounts for Rural Schools on Telecommunications, Internet

by Vicki Hobbs

Public and private elementary and secondary schools in rural areas can now receive a hefty discount on all commercially available telecommunications services, Internet access, and internal connections.

This "E-Rate" discount, which went into effect January 1, 1998 under the terms of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, is calculated on the basis of two factors: the percentage of students eligible for the national school lunch program and the school's location in a rural or urban area. Price cuts range from 20 to 90 percent, with schools in poorer, rural areas receiving the highest discounts.

> *"Schools in poorer, rural areas will receive the highest discounts, saving up to 90 percent of regular charges."*

The new program does not specify which telecommunications services are eligible for discount; that is left to the discretion of individual schools or consortia of schools. Discounted services may include basic telephone service; wireless communications; cable service; fractional or full T-1 voice, data, or video service; fiber optic services; and internal connections such as servers, hubs, and routers; and more. All services must be used for educational purposes; they cannot be resold by the school to other parties.

The discounts apply not only to schools but to libraries and rural health care providers. To participate, schools may apply either individually or as a consortium. The application is submitted to a national program administrator, who places the applicant's request for service on a national web page. Any provider has four weeks to provide a bid to the applicant for the requested services, after which applicants are free to select the bid of their choice.

The Fine Print

All interstate exchange carriers contribute to a Universal Service Fund (subject to an annual cap escalating to $2.25 billion), from which telecommunications providers may seek reimbursement for the difference between their pre-discount bid price and the discounted price paid by the school or library. Schools will not receive any funds directly.

Despite unresolved attempts to stop the program in court by Southwestern Bell, Pacific Bell, and Nevada Bell, it appears that the program will proceed as planned. But schools should take note of these important factors:

- **Schools must have a technology plan** approved by their state department of education (or other FCC-approved entity) before submitting a discount application.
- **Schools must complete an application** and have it approved by the federal fund administrator before they can receive the discount.
- **Applications will be approved on a first-come,** first-served basis within each application window.
- **Discounts can be applied to existing contracts** with the following restrictions:
    - No services occurring prior to January 1, 1998 will be discounted; no retroactive discounts are allowed.
    - Multi-year contracts entered into before November 8, 1996 will be honored for the term of the original contract.
    - Contracts entered into between November 8, 1996 and the date applications became available will be honored through December 31, 1998, after which applicants will be required to rebid the service.
    - All services initiated after the date applications became available must be bid out as part of the application process.
- **All applications meeting eligibility guidelines will be approved** as long as the funding cap has not been exceeded, but discount applications will be both required and approved on an annual basis.
- **File an application as quickly** as possible, because of the initial six-month funding cap of $1 billion.
- **At this time no restrictions** apply

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By the Numbers: Rural Challenge Grants

Total grants: 30 as of December 1997.
Total committed funds: $22 million (out of $37 million total budget)
Number of states: 30
Low income sites: 38% of projects, 57% of funds
Low- to mid-income sites: 62% of projects, 43% of funds
African American communities/schools: 7%
Latino communities/schools: 7%
Alaskan Native/American Indian communities/schools: 11%
Anglo communities/schools: 46%
Diverse population communities/schools: 29%
Work across all grades: 50%
Work across all subject areas: 46%
Connections with local cultures: 50%
Connections with local environments: 50%
Working on social justice issues: 21%
Match generated locally by partners: $26 million

on how many applications may be submitted by a school within any given year.

- **The discount covers not just Internet** access and inside wiring, but all services, from distance learning networks, such as two-way I-TV, to ordinary voice lines. Installation and maintenance costs are included as well.
- **All public and private schools** meeting the statutory definition of an elementary or secondary school as found in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 are eligible for the program, as long as they are not operating as a for-profit business and do not have an endowment in excess of $50 million.
- **Community consortiums** of users are allowed under the discount program in order to take advantage of lower prices. Any public sector entity may participate in such a consortium; however, the discounted rate itself is only available to schools, libraries, and rural health care providers. If a consortium includes an ineligible private sector member, eligible members of the consortium are restricted to only those discounted services for which generally tariffed rates are available. Schools should work with local governments, libraries, hospitals, and community agencies and organizations in planning for a community-wide telecommunications infrastructure.
- **To learn the latest** about the application process, access the FCC's LearnNet home page at http://www.fcc.gov/learnnet/ or the U.S. Department of Education's technology page at http://www.ed.gov/Technology/ (or call 1-800-USA-LEARN). Other good sources of information include the Foundation for Rural Service's "Guide to Telecommunications Discounts for Rural Schools," which can be found at http://www.frs.org/ and the EdLiNC home page, located at http://www.itc.org/edlinc/index.html. Applications may be downloaded from any of the above sites.

Vicki Hobbs is Telecommunications Advisor to the Rural Challenge. The co-author of Virtual Classrooms: Educational Opportunity Through Two-Way Interactive Television, *she lives in Columbia, Missouri.*

National Notes

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good beginning.

Linda Martin has joined the national office staff, helping with writing, research, and tracking grants. Jack Hills, formerly of the Brookings Institution, is our new Vice President, responsible for development, helping raise funds to support the work of the national office and helping our partners become even better at raising funds to support their work locally.

Best wishes for your work, and continued thanks for your help in the work we do together.

—Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal, Co-Directors

Working Definitions

continued from page 4

Community refers to a group of people living in a particular geographic location who together create a sustaining way of life, drawing on their strengths and diversity, the environmental resources that surround them, the educational resources within their reach, and the political, moral, and spiritual values they name as their own. Homogeneity as a dominant feature is not implied.

Schooling refers to the *institution* of "school" and its formalized structures: buildings, classrooms, normative curriculum, standards, professional teachers and administrators, and external funding.

Student learning in the context of the Rural Challenge includes more than typical standardized measures can portray: the local environment's ecology, people, economic conditions, relationships with other geographic and political entities, possibilities and limitations, and cultural strengths and values. Academic learning matters for what it enables students to do in the world and for the personal enrichment it provides.

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Books

What Holds Us Here

Common Ground: A Gathering of Poems on Rural Life. Thom Tammaro and Mark Vinz, eds. Dacotah Territory Press (Box 931, Moorhead, MN 56560), 1990. $7.50.

"Something holds us here–" begins Mark Vinz's poem "Midcontinent," and *Common Ground: A Gathering of Poems on Rural Life*, celebrates and illustrates those roots that hold deep in rural places. This fine anthology collects the work of 30 contemporary Midwestern poets who gathered at a 1986 festival of rural writers at South West State University in Marshall, Minnesota. Wendell Berry, Leo Dangel, Bill Holm, and Nancy Paddock are among the many voices here who testify to the significance of a sense of place in rural life, holding us through these poems to what is honest and real and true.

—*Linda Martin*

Tales from the Rural Trail,

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one drove over two hours to get to work. This district was clearly a way station in their pursuit of better pay and higher status.

Shifts in economic base have eaten away at the identity and cohesiveness of many rural areas. In one central Texas county all five school districts were staying open, if not thriving, due to a boom in the foster care business. Unable to support themselves in the cattle, goat or sheep business, former ranch families were now selling home care in a safer white middle-class environment for hundreds of foster children sent from places like Dallas and Houston. Foster children made up over 25 percent of one district's student population.

For such places "rural" is less reality than it is heritage, in the sense that Navajo speak of their language as a heritage language—ignored, forgotten, and not handed down through generations. Rural means something slightly different when the children attending the schools are not from the surrounding country, or when their parents are recent ex-urbanites who work and shop in cities. Or when none of the teachers or administrators grew up there or live there.

Where do you start when no one seems to know much about the place—its history, ecology, culture? I have come to believe that you start from where you are with people who have the capacity and desire to learn. You have to reclaim the knowledge of the place.

Our idea of what is rural shouldn't fossilize on some old picture in our minds of rural. Perhaps part of the Rural Challenge *is* both "world" and "whirl." And it's not just my accent.

Belle Zars is the Rural Challenge steward for Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. She serves as liaison with Texas Interfaith, Llano Grande Research Project, and the Arkansas site of the Bread Loaf School of English.

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The Rural Challenge News Spring 1998

Schools serving their communities, communities serving their schools

'Circles of Wisdom' Joins Other New Rural Challenge Partners

Pueblo Indian schoolchildren from 19 separate governmental units along the Rio Grande Valley will soon be learning from a new curriculum called "Circles of Wisdom: Capturing the Dream," as a result of a new three-year Rural Challenge grant.

Distinct social, cultural and governmental entities for thousands of years, the Pueblos today have school-age children in schools operated by the Pueblos themselves, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and public school districts. Many of these students attend grades seven through twelve at the Santa Fe Indian School, a tribally operated grant school serving the Pueblos as well as other tribes throughout the country. Today, that school enrolls approximately 550 students, more than 80 percent of whom are from the 19 Pueblos.

> *"My school is a place where my people's values are as precious as rain on a dry day, where ideas are nurtured as we do corn in the fields."*

Circles of Wisdom grew out of a community based education model introduced at the Santa Fe Indian School in 1995, with help from the Intel Corporation and the United States Department of Energy. Through the program, high school students worked in the field with their home tribal communities on issues and problems related to the environment, health, and safety.

Students traveled to their Pueblos three days each week, working side by side with tribal environmental departments to study and preserve the natural environments in their ancestral homelands. Because the school had access to technological tools not available in the Pueblos themselves, students provided the technological back-up needed to support the environmental work. They prepared and presented this information for the Pueblo Councils, which used the information to make critical decisions on environmental issues facing their tribes.

Over the next three years Circles of Wisdom will not only replace the entire existing curriculum of the Santa Fe Indian School, but also be integrated into the K–6 and K–8 feeder schools serving the Core Tribe communities. In time, Pueblo students from kindergarten through twelfth grade will be producing work that is meaningful and important to their respective communities and their futures.

continued on next page

Summer Sharing Scheduled by Evaluation Team

Teachers, parents, community people and students from various Rural Challenge sites will share important stories of their work at five different Summer Regional Research and Evaluation Conferences at various times in June, July and August, director Vito Perrone of Harvard University has announced. He expects to focus the team's evaluation on the following issues:

- *Stories of community-school exchange, a central concept of the Rural Challenge.*
- *Student work, especially in relation to its quality, complexity, consequential subject matter, powerful questions, challenge, and attention to place.*
- *Curriculum of place, with an eye to collecting more examples of good curriculum work to be part of a larger report.*

"We also see the convocations as opportunities for participants to learn from one another, become more energized around the large hopes of the Rural Challenge, and feel part of something that goes beyond their local communities," says Perrone. He expects 40 to 50 participants at each of the convocations—"small enough," he points out, "for good conversations, focused interviews, and easy sharing of student work, curriculum materials, videos and photographs."

Information on dates and sites will go out to sites in April, he said.

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New Partners

continued from page one

"Learn in Beauty"

Helped by another recent Rural Challenge grant, children in 13 Navajo Nation schools in Arizona will be learning more about their language and culture through the "Learn in Beauty" program.

With support from the Ford Foundation and the National Science Foundation, the Nation has already provided teacher education training to more than 150 Navajo speakers and strengthened math and science instruction by integrating it with Navajo language and culture. Learn in Beauty aims to bolster that success, focusing on comprehensive and system-wide staff development, curriculum and pedagogy, community links, and networking. Rural Challenge funds will help bring these pieces into a comprehensive whole that centers on teaching the Dine language and a cultural teaching perspective.

To adequately prepare children for the roles they must play in their Nation's survival, the Learn in Beauty program is grounded not in Western paradigms, but rather in the culture, language, and world view of the Navajo people. Students learn to converse and communicate with elders in Dine language. Their learning takes place on the Navajo reservation, reflecting a sense of place and revitalizing traditional values and knowledge. By engaging the "whole village" in planning and learning, the project aims to strengthen school and community relationships and parental support for learning.

The Learn in Beauty program

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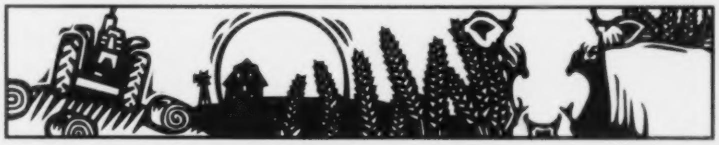

Comment

A Special Place

by Dr. Jim Moffitt

My education is precious to me because it is part of my Indian community. My school is a place where my friends, relatives and other people come together to learn from one another. It is a place where my people's values are as precious as rain on a dry day, a place where ideas are nurtured as we do corn in the fields.

I learn about the needs and desires of my people and my community. I learn how I can help them through remaining and participating with those I love. We must come together with one voice, one heart, and one mission, to strengthen the Indian way of life.

The basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic I learn not as tricks, but as means to help me reach an understanding of all man's commonality through appreciation of shared books, music, customs. From the way I am taught and treated, I learn to respect others, to have pride in myself, to be always socially, spiritually, and physically strong, and to have confidence and inner strength to become a leader in any path I walk because I am mentally prepared.

As a young person, this is my time to explore, to walk new paths, to seek new experiences and career opportunities, but always to remain true to my Indian self.

I have learned that education and wisdom happen whenever people speak with good thoughts in a caring, supportive environment, and that my teachers are all those people who help me to understand myself and the world.

There is a larger society, a larger world in which I must learn to live and survive, but I must never forget who I am and where I am from.

The past helps me see the future.

School is a special place, as special as life itself, fixed in our time, for us to share together as the stars in the night.

The late Dr. Jim Moffitt helped found the Santa Fe Indian Schools, which still affirms this philosophy.

ruralmatters

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Web site: www.ruralchallenge.org

New Partners

continued from page two

will begin with a small group of schools, which will become leaders to other schools in the Navajo cluster by modeling new approaches and instructional strategies, and sharing their growing knowledge.

A Navajo Credo

"We are the Holy People of the Earth," reads a belief statement adopted by the Education Committee of the Navajo Nation Council on June 14, 1994. "We are created and placed between our Mother Earth and Father Sky. Our Home, the Four Sacred Mountains, with the entrance to the East, embodies our Way of Life. It provides strength, peace and beauty within us.

"Spirituality, intellect, planning and life have been instilled within us; through these attributes we attain knowledge and wisdom. We shall combine the best learning and knowledge of other societies with that of our own for the benefit of our future.

"With that, our children will walk with beauty before them, beauty behind them, beauty beneath them, beauty above them, beauty around them, beauty within them and will always be respectful and live in harmony with natural law. Our children will go forth in life endowed with what is required to achieve their ultimate aspirations."

Sustainable Community

In the upper Clearwater Valley in north central Idaho, the communities of Elk City and Kooskia share

continued on page 8

Notes

from the National Office

The Rural Challenge has now reached middle age in terms of its five-year, $50 million agreement with the Annenberg Foundation. This is an appropriate time to take stock of what's been accomplished and what remains to do by June 30, 2000 so we all can say to Ambassador Annenberg, "We have invested your gift well in the future of rural schools and rural communities." Moreover, it is none too soon to think about the life of the Rural Challenge beyond the year 2000. A few highlights at this midway point:

We are clearly on the down side of the grants program, having funded thirty projects involving between 250 and 300 schools and communities. The Grants Committee has been taking a careful look at the grants portfolio with an eye towards using the remaining funds to create a balanced portfolio—taking into account geography, race, and economics as well as the nature of the work proposed. We are looking for more African-American and Hispanic sites. Our expectations for systemic work—for involvement of all grades and subject matter areas—have gone up. Finally, most of the currently funded projects have been initiated by the schools. The Committee would very much like to see some projects where the initial energy resides in the community. Yes, it's true. Getting funded at this stage of the Challenge is more difficult than it was in the beginning.

As the funded projects become more mature, we hear an increasing number of interesting and powerful ways that students are engaged in learning,examples of how schools are "serving and served by their communities." Creating such projects appears to be relatively easy. What we know very little about, and where we need all of our best thinking, is how these projects can evolve into systemic school reform. How do we make place-based learning central to the process of schooling, not just occasional efforts at the margins? Be thinking about this issue. It will be on the agenda for the June Rendezvous, and it will be the beginning focus of the fourth component of the Rural Challenge: public engagement.

Two important actions marked the February Board meeting. First was the go-ahead with the engagement plan, which means finding a full-time person to work with our funded partners on ways to deepen the work. We believe that this is best done by having the opportunity to learn from each other. You will hear much more about just how this will happen in the coming months. Second, we began a long-range planning process to evolve the Rural Challenge organization into an ongoing presence in support of rural school and community renewal. To frame this discussion we posed three questions, on which we would like your thoughts as well.

1. How do we move from a "lean" organization (with a big budget and low numbers of personnel) that gives out dollars, to one that marshals activity in diverse ways with lots of personnel or human resources and diffused budgets (less money)?

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Rendezvous^2: A Meeting of People, Work, and Ideas

Rural Challenge grantees, people who have received invitations to submit proposals to the Board, and people with planning grants will have the opportunity to gather on June 25 through 27 in the mountains of Granby, Colorado for the second Rural Challenge Rendezvous, known as "Rendezvous^2."

At last year's Rendezvous, participants appreciated opportunities to share ideas, gather strength from one another, and see that they are part of a much larger, inspirational movement.

Rendezvous^2 will again be held at the Inn at Silvercreek; we have reserved the entire Inn for our meeting. There will be a few logistical changes from last year. Travel expenses will not be provided by the National Office. Participants should make their own travel, transportation, and lodging arrangements. Our group has grown, and the facility can only hold 300 people; and so, alas, a strict limit of five people per project site can be accommodated. An ideal project team will include one student, one community member or parent, one project director, one school district administrator, and one teacher.

Planning for Rendezvous^2 will once again be done collaboratively. The planning team will involve volunteers, and we hope you are one of them. We particularly encourage participation of students, as they made such a difference last year. E-mail will be used for planning communication. To sign up for the Rendezvous planning listserve, send a message to <requests@ruralchallenge. org> with the words "subscribe rendezvous" in the body of the e-mail. In your message, please let us know your name, role, and connection to the Rural Challenge.

Rendezvous^2 will be a chance to affirm and celebrate good work, to share expertise, uncertainties, and successes, and to begin and continue ongoing conversations about genuinely good, genuinely rural schools.

Alan Young Is New Appalachia Steward

Alan DeYoung joined the Rural Challenge in January as steward to the Appalachia region, which includes Tennessee, Eastern Kentucky, West Virginia, Western Virginia, and Southern Ohio.

A professor at the University of Kentucky in both sociology and the Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation department, Alan brings over 15 years of experience in areas related to the Rural Challenge mission. He has been involved in several school and community evaluation projects in Appalachia.

Appalachian schools embody rural education, Alan says; and working with the Rural Challenge is "an opportunity to facilitate these schools financially, with moral support, and the recognition needed for their survival."

Jack Hills Begins As Rural Challenge Vice President; Will Help Raise Funds

Jack Hills

Welcoming "a great opportunity to work for a wonderful cause," John M. (Jack) Hills, formerly of the Brookings Institution, began work in January as the Rural Challenge's new Vice President. His responsibilities include development and helping raise funds to support the work of the national office and Rural Challenge programs. He will also be available to consult with our project partners, helping generate financial resources to support their work locally.

In his first months, Jack is researching a public relations and development package for possible funders, to help the work of the Rural Challenge continue after the initial Annenberg money is gone. Calling the Rural Challenge "an opportunity to create positive change in rural communities and education," he looks forward to helping it build a lasting legacy.

Policy Matters

Does Consolidation Deny Rural Kids Equal Access?

by Marty Strange

Can closing a small, remote school against the wishes of the community it serves, and busing the children long distances to a consolidated school, be a form of discrimination that denies those students equal access to a quality education?

The West Virginia Supreme Court will soon decide that question, in a case with national significance as states try to sort out the complex relationships among size, per-pupil cost, and quality education in both rural and urban settings.

This is the first case that clearly addresses the issue of what "equal access" to a "thorough and efficient" education means for small schools.

The lower court has already ruled in favor of the small high school. The Pendleton County Board of Education and the West Virginia State Board of Education acted in violation of the state's constitution, Judge Tod J. Kaufman ruled in November 1997, by closing Circleville High School in the mountainous region of eastern West Virginia near the base of Spruce Knob, the state's highest peak.

Further, the judge ruled that the West Virginia School Building Authority (SBA), which finances school construction in the state, violated the state constitution by requiring schools to meet minimum size criteria before they qualified for construction funding. Also unconstitutional, he found, was the provision in the state's school aid formula that discriminates against sparsely populated counties by capping state support for salaries at a maximum of 74 teachers per 1000 students.

In all three areas, Judge Kaufman ruled, the actions violated state constitutional provisions requiring that a thorough and efficient education be provided to all students without discrimination. In effect, he made "place-ism"—the act of discriminating against a child on the basis of where that child lives—unconstitutional.

The Facts

The two communities of Circleville and Franklin are about 17 miles apart—over a 3,700-foot mountain that divides the North Fork Valley from the South Branch Valley—but as with all West Virginia schools, their school district is a county body. In 1995, the Pendleton County school board voted to consolidate the high school at Circleville into the one at Franklin, which would be expanded and renovated to accommodate the larger student body. The decision was made after the state School Building Authority pledged to provide over $7 million for the work.

Circleville has about 130 students in grades 7 through 12, and Franklin about 500. They are the only schools with those grades in the county. To get to Franklin and back home, Circleville students will have to spend between 60 and 100 more minutes on the bus than they do now. Three fourths of them will be on the bus over an hour and a half daily, and some as much as two and a half hours, beginning as early as about 6:30 a.m. They will travel treacherous mountainous roads in winter driving conditions, in a sparsely populated county whose remoteness and isolation already create the highest school busing costs per student in the state.

> *"A 'thorough and efficient education' does not imply 'economies of scale,' the lower court ruled. Will the high court agree?"*

The Circleville community is poorer than Franklin, with half the students receiving free or reduced-price lunches, twice the rate at Franklin. But despite community poverty (or perhaps because of it), Circleville High School has "maintained an exceptionally high rate of participation by its students in extracurricular activities, an effective dropout prevention program, an after-school latch-key program, and a high degree of parental and community involvement in the school," the Court noted.

Losing that asset by gaining a much longer commute, the Court said, "will cause significant damage to the educational opportunities and

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Does Consolidation Deny Rural Kids Equal Access?

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prospects of Circleville students."

Board members decided to close the Circleville school chiefly to satisfy the requirement that construction aid go only to larger schools, without considering enriching the curriculum at Circleville using already installed distance learning technology. They acted under pressure from the Building Authority and the state Department of Education, the Court found, noting that the Circleville school could be renovated at a reasonable cost. The school is on the National Register of Historic Places, as the last project undertaken by the Depression era's Works Progress Administration.

> *"Is discriminating on the basis of where someone lives—or 'place-ism'—unconstitutional?"*

Since 1990, 258 (or 26 percent) of West Virginia schools have been closed, and 28 more are scheduled to shut down. The SBA has given almost all of its funding to large schools, arguing that "economies of scale" require an efficient school to meet minimum enrollment requirements—1050 students in grades 7–12—to be eligible for construction aid. Given this county's sparse population (about one student per square mile in those grades), the Court noted, an "efficient" school would have to draw students from an area the size of Rhode Island.

But despite the massive closings accommodated by this pattern of funding, there has been virtually no net change in the personnel costs per pupil in West Virginia since the advent of its consolidation program.

By refusing to recognize that "efficiency" is not merely a matter of school size, but must take into account the demographics of the community the school serves, the sparsity of the population, the terrain, and other local conditions, the SBA's economies of scale requirements are arbitrary and lack any rational basis, the Court ruled. It wryly noted that as of 1996, five of the nine SBA members were connected with the construction or real estate industries, and that none were professional educators.

Crucial Conclusions

In making this important decision, the Court had to reach several crucial conclusions about how several factors—the size and location of a school, the socio-economic status of the community it serves, the roles that community plays in the school and school plays in the community—interact to affect the quality and the cost of the education children receive. Such factors cannot be ignored, the Court found, in determining whether a state's educational system is providing equal access to a thorough and efficient education for all children. It further found that:

- The Circleville School is the social, cultural, educational, and recreational center of the North Fork Valley, and its closure will have a serious adverse effect on the life, spirit, and economy of that community.
- Substantial time spent traveling to school contributes to students' fatigue, seriously intrudes on their time for study and extracurricular activities, and generally has a significant, negative impact on the quality of their education.
- Students from families with a lower socio-economic status generally perform better in smaller schools and in schools within their own communities, where they can have more opportunities to participate in the life of the school, a more dependable support network within the school, and more parental involvement. Small school size helps to blunt the negative impact of poverty on educational achievement. Large schools are not just dysfunctional for poor children; such schools dramatically compound the disadvantages that poor children inevitably confront. Increased school size does not correlate positively with educational quality or educational outcomes.
- The large majority of students do not benefit from curricular enhancements because most students do not venture beyond the core curriculum even when specialized course offerings are available; such offerings tend to benefit primarily children from families with a high socio-economic status.
- Closing community schools and busing rural students to consolidated schools, especially when the bused children are from poorer backgrounds, creates a significant risk of substantially increasing the dropout rate among such students.
- Education in sparsely populated counties costs more than in more heavily populated counties. Either the rural counties must have smaller schools, or they must spend more money to transport students longer distances to get to larger schools.

Technology Spans Mountain Passes to Link Remote Schools

Mountain passes make good neighbors, the four small school California districts that make up the North Coast Rural Challenge Consortium have found. Though they would have to drive more than 500 miles of remote mountain roads to visit each other in person, educators and community members from Mendocino, Laytonville, Anderson Valley, and Point Arena are instead using technology to join forces on the environmental and other issues that affect them all.

From composting to oral history projects, these rural districts are using sophisticated technology to create a sense of actual and "virtual" community that is firmly rooted in their shared values.

Restoring the watershed area they all share, for instance, has become a focal point of science studies in the four districts, where schoolchildren are gathering data on rainfall, spring and stream flows, well-water levels, and surface and ground water quality. Working with state park officials and community leaders, they will create a CD-Rom that links their efforts and resources.

Sustainability in energy and other resources used by their communities also links several curriculum projects. A Mendocino Middle School science class is working to make their school a model of renewable energy design. A Laytonville High School class put together a straw bale mushroom cultivation room, demonstrating how hardwood by-products can benefit both ecology and economy.

Social issues also gain from sharing across the ether. Students are working on a violence protection program, and are even setting up a "Virtual Teen Center," where they can hang out in cyberspace.

The project has economic ramifications for the area as well. Community mentors and business partners work closely with the schools. Via teleconferencing, a Mendocino company is teaching students from three of the high schools to develop software; and another project is developing "eco-brochures" that will be sold in a local bookstore.

In what Rural Challenge leaders call a model of effective practice, "teachers on special assignment" in each location coordinate and coach the many projects within and across districts. Before long, other Rural Challenge partners will be able to log on and learn first hand what's next on the North Coast network.

A student demonstrates "how seeds travel" to schoolmates in the North Coast Consortium, where a focus on high-tech communications serves an underlying concern for the environment.

In Colorado, Tiny Charter Schools Join Talents

Resisting district pressure to bus children long distances to larger schools, parents and teachers from five remote elementary schools in Colorado struck out on their own a few years ago and founded public charter schools.

The network they started, with help from Rural Challenge funds, is now a thriving example of how one- or two-room schoolhouses can provide a rich, multi-age learning experience, which makes the most of the local community without sacrificing contact with the larger world. And from these five diverse communities of Battle Rock, Crestone, Marble, Guffey, and Lake George, the word is getting out to others who struggle to keep their small schools open.

With the help of community mentors, students are learning everything from local geology and archeology to sign language and Navajo language. Experiential learning is a top priority; schools have bought tents and sleeping bags so that students could spend more time studying the outdoors.

In the town of Marble, students are helping renovate the large town museum (which also houses their school), keeping track of its inventory on a computer. In Lake George, the school is helping make up the new community band.

Each school's staff visits another school as "critical friends," giving feedback and sharing strategies on instruction and assessment in a multi-age classroom. Students will travel too, to exhibit their work.

New Rural Challenge Partners

continued from page three

a rich common history, vast expanses of natural resource treasures, and the desire to improve the overall health of their places. Now, with the help of a Rural Challenge grant, they will involve schools and students in their plans to sustain a viable way of life.

At the Elk City School, the communities had already begun a fine arts and literature–based integrated studies program, which the new grant will help to expand into a cluster of schools. A folk arts program, for example, promotes community and school awareness of local cultural folk arts, and has started up a folk arts store. The Arts Outside the Classroom project brings arts to the area, forms local groups to promote the arts, and forms partnerships with state and tribal groups.

In addition, the Elk City–Kooskia cluster will add to its schools' curriculum an outdoor education program. This Natural Resources Link will emphasize the many natural resources of the area, how they have been used in the past, how they are used now, and how they can be used in the future to sustain the local way of life and natural heritage.

Students will have opportunities for hands-on learning in surrounding outdoor classrooms, and they will design, build, and maintain an "environmental database" to analyze the area's resources. Each class will establish and monitor a study plot from year to year, using the resulting data to study the characteristics associated with human impact on the environment and the resulting consequences.

Teacher training, curriculum design, and planning carried out during the first year of the Natural Resources Link project will provide information and resources to incorporate into the entire curriculum. Finally, an entrepreneurial summer camp program will help sustain the Rural Challenge endeavors, benefiting students both within and outside the communities.

Finally, the school communities will deepen their work in natural resources and the arts through participating in an innovative building project, the Continuing Education and Performing Arts Center. Using timber frame construction techniques and dead or dying timbers commonly thought as "waste" wood, the Center will stand as a national example of what can be done with timber that our society routinely throws away. The project began as a 1996 partnership between the Elk City School, the United States Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, and the National Timber Framers Guild.

NATIONAL OFFICE NOTES

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2. How do we simultaneously deepen and broaden the work in relation to schools and communities?

3. How do we transition from an organization perceived as one from which you take things, to one perceived as one to which you give things?

In the coming weeks members of the Board will be working in small groups to create alternative visions of what the Rural Challenge should look like ten years from now. We continue to create the path by walking. Stay tuned.

—Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal,
Co-Directors

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rural matters

The Rural Challenge News Summer 1998

Schools serving their communities, communities serving their schools

'Wise Villages' Link Adults and Children in Real-Life Learning

by Toni Haas

The phone rang at the Rural Challenge national office one snowy day, when we had had just about as much winter as we could stand, and it was Dr. Robert M. Cornett, calling from Kentucky to say he thought we were on the right track.

> *"The real world is not a set of isolated facts. Soil, weeds, seeds, sun, water, and manure are all related to a cow."*

A former highly placed Kentucky State Government bureaucrat, Dr. Cornett told us of his mission to make Kentucky's school reform effort work for young people, older people, and the communities they make up. He is working to create "Wise Villages," a philosophy outlined in his booklet *The Wise Village: A Status Report,* which he gave us permission to reprint and distribute. (Call or write Box 1569, Granby, CO 80446 for your copy.) Try these excerpts, and ask yourself: Are you creating a Wise Village in your community?

". . . A Wise Village is not a 'thing' to be owned or a 'place' to be located. A Wise Village is any effective linkage between responsible adults and children, and the location is wherever these linkages occur. . . . Their common sense and commitment to children, not authority or credentials, make Wise Village people the equal of any experts or institutions.

". . . Some highly respected experts understand the difference between the real learning that can come from projects involving real people in real communities, and the simulation of real life that is the best that schools can do by themselves.

". . . A community that becomes a real partner with a school is not dependent upon the school bureaucracy or testing experts for information about the school.

". . . Although learning is what the students need, as both common sense and research tell us, schooling is what bureaucracies are geared up to provide. This disconnect between learning and schooling is the core reason why school improvement programs have generally not worked well.

". . . In schools run by bureaucracies, knowledge tends to be presented in isolated fragments, and tests typically reward memorization of isolated facts. As any farmer

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When a six-district consolidation move threatened their small community, students in rural southwestern Minnesota helped pass a bond issue to start the Southwest Star Concept School. Here they work on constructing a school greenhouse. For the story in their own words, see page four.

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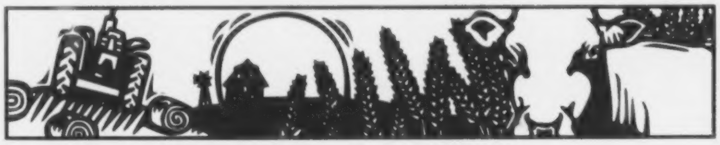
Wise Villages

continued from page one

knows, however, the real world is not a set of isolated facts: soil, weeds, seeds, sun, water, and manure are all related to a cow. Farmers have long since learned to integrate all of these systems. . . . This integrative capacity, which has made American farmers so incredibly creative and efficient, is readily available to any child living in a farm community. Every community, rural or urban, has its own reality that involves the integration of knowledge, and this reality can be made available to the children.

. . . " 'Real life,' however, tends to take on a special meaning as viewed from the perspective of a bureaucratic school. 'Real life' means, not what really happens in life, but what a school is capable of creating that simulates real life. . . . A school cannot, by itself, go very far in providing the emotional connection that makes an experience real. A school band playing for a PTA meeting cannot come even close to what the Wise Village Pickers [a student bluegrass band at Stanton Elementary, one of the Rural Challenge sites of the Appalachian Rural Education Network] experience when they perform before an audience of serious bluegrass fans. While the PTA can offer polite applause, the serious bluegrass fans can provide well-informed enthusiasm and criticism; this is a huge difference. These are not students playing music, they are musicians.

". . . Wise Villages must be flea markets rather than department stores; everybody who has something valuable to share with children needs to be included, not just the few who have 'authority.'"



Comment

Indian Beliefs about Messengers of God

by Pat Locke

With few exceptions, the textbooks and other written materials about American Indians available to America's schoolchildren tend to denigrate the belief systems of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

Schoolchildren get the idea that Indians were and are animists, that they worship gods, trees, mountains and rivers and are too simple or primitive to understand the concept of a Supreme Being.

At the 1993 Centennial World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago, Illinois, Jacqueline Left Hand Bull and I made a presentation called "Messengers of God to the Peoples of the Western Hemisphere," describing 23 Messengers of God, six of whom were women. We presented information about the names of these Messengers; the name of God in each Native language, when each Messenger was sent by God to a particular cultural entity; and what the sacred teachings and liturgies of each Messenger were and are.

To our amazement, delegates from the world's religions voted to acknowledge the validity of these indigenous belief systems of the peoples of Canada, the United States, Mexico, Central and South America.

Research is continuing in order to learn more about additional indigenous religions that existed in the past and those that are alive today. This research is difficult because these religions were hidden until the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in the 1980s.

A member of the Rural Challenge's Board of Directors and a MacArthur Fellow from 1991 to 1996, Pat Locke consults and lectures on American Indian issues, value and belief systems, social structures, tribal governance, and education.

ruralmatters

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Web site: www.ruralchallenge.org

Maine Educator to Lead Connections Among Rural Partners

Marylyn Wentworth, the new Coordinator of Capacity Building and Connections for the Rural Challenge, comes to this work with 37 years as an educator. She has taught nearly every age level, has been a consultant to schools engaged in reform both locally and nationally, and has worked with many initiatives involving teacher practice and school-community connections. As she assumes her new job she steps down from her position on the Rural Challenge Board.

Her office is in Kennebunk, Maine where she lives on a cooperative rural farm.

Good schools become "public institutions, serving and served by their communities," Marylyn says, "when people work together on learning and developing the capacity to live well in a place, acting on the belief that every person contributes to our shared future, and connecting to local culture and ecology." She aims to help Rural Challenge partners make those connections at every level, from individual classrooms to an integrated national network.

Marylyn sees her role as "shaping a program that will broaden and deepen the work now under way" by facilitating connections among people who want to increase the capacity of rural communities to develop, support and operate good schools. The shape of this program, she says, will come from the input of the many constituencies that define the Rural Challenge.

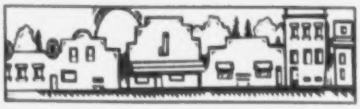
"I plan to convene national gatherings on issues and actions of importance to varied constituencies," she says, "and to facilitate national networking, offer technical assistance, and sponsor Capacity Building Institutes."

In addition, she hopes to increase communications and connections between Rural Challenge Partners and "the people and institutions who would be their natural allies and partners." Primarily, she says, "I hope to listen well to all the many people connected to the Rural Challenge and respond in creative ways to their needs and ideas."

Marylyn can be reached at Rural Challenge, 50 Maine St. #258, Kennebunk, ME 04043; by fax and phone at (207) 985-8177; by e-mail: ruralconnect@gwi.net or marylynw@gwi.net.

Notes

from the National Office



Can we leverage the generous pledge of Ambassador Annenberg into a powerful social movement that improves education and rural communities? Three years into the Rural Challenge, the Board is working on plans to turn our initial five-year plans into a permanent, sustainable organization.

Many more people than we can accommodate want to come to our second Rendezvous. Work in the field is affirmed by positive press coverage. We've received a generous grant from the Annenberg Foundation to design communications to extend our reach and engage new allies. The Grants Program continues to create a portfolio of work representing the variety of solutions rural people are inventing to make life better in rural communities and for rural children. The Policy Program is moving on significant issues and sponsoring research that will inform education in urban as well as rural places. Our development work is well begun, and we're creating a new program of connections and capacity building, targeted at deepening the work of our current partners and at attracting new energy to the cause.

We are profoundly grateful for all the efforts that make the Rural Challenge unique in the history of school reform, of community revitalization, and of philanthropy. Particularly, we acknowledge the hard work of Joan Lipsitz and Marylyn Wentworth, who are leaving this Board. Joan will continue to work on contract with our grants program and Marylyn will assume staff responsibilities for connections and capacity building. To them, and to all of you who believe as we do that good schools are public institutions, serving and served by their communities, we say thanks.

—Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal, Co-Directors

Starting a Community School: A Student Scrapbook

Resisting a six-district consolidation move, teachers, parents, students, and community members in the rural district of Heron Lake–Okabena in southwestern Minnesota branched off to form their own school for grades 7 to 12, which opened its doors to 250 students in September 1997. Students Amy Pohlman, Sarah Hartberg, Brenda Henning, Teresa Schneider, Krista Frederickson, and Adam Hotzler here describe the adventure of helping create the Southwest Star Concept School, based on the concepts of community-school interaction and hands-on learning.

Southwest Star Concept School grew from the sayings "Bigger isn't always better" and "If we think we can, we can." Although teachers did most of the initial planning, they needed help. The first step was forming committees of staff, students, and volunteers from the community, to work on our mission statement, curriculum, extra-curricular program, facilities, marketing, and technology. We had the opportunity to participate on one or more committees. More than 100 area residents participated in the planning. These committees still stand, with many community members attending bimonthly meetings.

All courses involve hands-on activities that prepare us for college or employment. Our Agricultural Building Construction class constructed a greenhouse, starting with sketchy instructions that came with the materials. We didn't know what to do at first, but students with construction experience helped us figure it out. Working on the greenhouse every day, we finished it by the end of the quarter, and it is used by many classes and our Future Farmers of America teams.

We do not sit through a seven-period day in 40-minute classes listening to lectures or doing busy work. Like college classes, ours last for 85 minutes, and the time passes quickly. We may read from a book or do a worksheet, but at least half our time is devoted to interactive, hands-on activities that help us understand the material and apply it to real life. Our Field Biology class conducted daily tests at nearby Okabena Creek, for instance.

Students are also going into the community for applied learning experiences. Our Community Involvement class volunteers at the local hospital, nursing home, and environmental learning center. After learning about group behaviors, students in a sociology class taped interviews with community members, then combined highlights of each interview to produce a video or cassette tape for our presentation night. We learned and shared the history of our communities and the people within them.

Our mascot is a Quasar, which is a cluster of superstars, and Quasar fans show they are proud of their school. In the 1996–97 school year, it was not considered cool to show school spirit and cheer at games. This year it is the exact opposite; our school has been commended by other area schools for our excellent sportsmanship and enthusiasm. The community also adds support, participating in our Pep Band at home games.

Our school store, the Quasar Quick Stop, is entirely run by students, who learn marketing techniques and business ethics while they take inventory, order, and sell clothing and food. Since an average person's first five jobs are in sales, these students get a head start on the employment market, and the store provides a place for students to eat and socialize.

We needed 60 percent voter approval to improve an 81-year-old building so that our facilities would fit our curriculum. Many community members supported the bond issue, but some were completely against it. A representative of the Minnesota Department of Children, Family, and Learning had said that the vote and the school would fail, but we knew that it was up to us as a community to determine our future. Hundreds attended two public meetings to discuss the School Board's plans. Students made signs supporting the referendum and called citizens to remind them to vote. Then we waited anxiously to hear the results. On the night of the referendum, we had an away girls basketball game. We listened to the radio the whole way home to find out if the bond issue had passed. Finally, our bus driver called his wife and we learned that it had been approved by 69 percent of the voters, with a record-high voter turnout. Construction of our new building and remodeling of the old one started in May 1998.

Policy Matters

Making the E-Rate Happen: Will a Promise Made Be a Promise Kept?

by Vicki M. Hobbs

Rural schools and libraries may not get the deep discounts on telecommunications services that Congress authorized in 1996, if they do not press lawmakers to keep their pledge in the coming months. By threatening to raise long-distance rates across the board, big companies like AT&T, MCI, and Sprint are lobbying hard to keep down their share in equalizing costs for Internet hookups in isolated rural communities where long-distance rates are higher.

To provide the promised "E-rate" to the more than 30,000 schools and libraries that have already applied for it [see *Rural Matters*, Winter 1998] will cost roughly $2.02 billion in fiscal year 1998. (Costs of the program will not continue at that rate, as much of that estimate consists of one-time wiring costs.) By law, the program is capped at $2.25 billion annually.

Long-distance carriers must pay some of that cost, in trade for the reduced access fees they have paid since Congress deregulated their industry. But alarmed by the size of the E-rate program, they are already planning a surcharge on customer phone bills to help foot the bill.

Under pressure from Congress, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has reduced the required contributions by long-distance carriers to $625 million for the first half of 1998. If Congress limits the $2.25 billion cap to $1.67 billion for 1998, the FCC reported in May, the amount long-distance companies pay would not exceed their reduction in access fees, and they would not need to raise long-distance rates.

But under this scenario, all schools and libraries will not get the discounts in access fees that the law intended. Can hikes in long distance rates be avoided *and* the compact with schools and libraries be upheld?

Major education organizations and the White House both oppose a proposal to eliminate discounts on the expensive "inside wiring" usually provided by other companies than telecommunications providers. Funding only the highest-poverty schools, as FCC Chair William Kennard suggests for another solution, will shortchange rural schools that may have a lower percentage of free and reduced lunch eligibility but pay much more for telecommunications. Equity depends on *both* ability to pay and price of service.

Regardless of the method chosen to curtail the E-rate's price tag, school people should urge their Congressional representatives to follow several key principles:

1. Congress and the FCC must do everything in their power to avoid a breach of faith with the education and library communities. Drastically altering program guidelines at this point would most hurt those schools and libraries in most need of discounted telecommunications services.

2. The long-distance companies must not be allowed to raise rates simply as a way of engendering public support against the E-rate program.

3. Discounted telecommunications services as promised must be upheld for schools and libraries located in high-cost areas and for those having the least ability to pay.

The E-rate program can be successfully implemented without delay and at an affordable cost, but if it is to happen, Congressional detractors and long distance companies must rise to the occasion.

Raising Money, Making Connections

by Jack Hills

In the months since I joined the Rural Challenge team I have visited many who are involved, interested, or just hearing for the first time about the efforts in rural America. Grants have now been made in 31 states, affecting over 300 schools, but we must still raise $28 million in national, regional and local matches.

At the same time, we must plan for our efforts after the five years of Annenberg funding ends. Members of the Rural Challenge Board, the stewards, the evaluation team, national and community foundations staff, corporate leaders, and others interested in education have all shown keen interest in sustaining their parts.

In particular, they have drawn attention to key public policy issues such as rural poverty, jobs, the exodus from rural communities, the closing and consolidation

continued on page eight

Partners in the Rural Challenge: A Directory

Alaska Federation of Natives/Rural Education Consortium (AK)
Julie E. Kitka, President
Dorothy Larson, Oscar Kawagley, and Ray Barnhart, Project Directors
Alaska Federation of Natives
1577 C Street, Suite 300
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
907.274.3611 phone
907.276.7989 fax
email:ffrjjb@aurora.alaska.edu

Appalachian Rural Education Network (KY)
Wimberly Royster, Project Director
Kentucky Science and Technology Council, Inc.
PNC Bank Plaza
200 West Vine Street, #420
Lexington, KY 40507
606.255.3511, x. 225 phone
606.259.0986 fax
royster@pap.uky.edu

Breadloaf School of English (National project, headquartered in Vermont)
James Maddox, Director
Dixie Goswami, PI
Middlebury College
Middlebury, VT 05753
802.443.5418 phone
802.443.2060 fax
jim_maddox@breadnet.middlebury.edu
dixie_goswami@breadnet.middlebury.edu
BLSE@breadnet.middlebury.edu
http://www.blse.middlebury.edu

Cascade Consortium (WA)
Sandra Moody, Coordinator
Methow Valley School Dist. 350
18 Twin Lakes Road
Winthrop, WA 98862
509.996.2215 or
509.997.5970 phone
smoody@clovis.esd171.wednet.edu

Center for School Change(MN)
Joe Nathan, Director
c/o Humphrey Institute
University of Minnesota
301 19th Avenue, South
Minneapolis, MN 55455
612.626.1834 phone
612.625.0104 fax
jnathan@hhh.umn.edu
http://www.hhh.edu/centers/school-change/

Colorado Rural Charter Schools Network (CO)
Ginny Jarmillo, Project Director
37888 Highway 24
Lake George, CO 80827
719.748.3911 phone
719.748.8151 fax
osolee@usanet.com

Elk City/Kooskia Cluster (ID)
Communities Creating Connections
Mary Beth Funk
P.O. Box 206
Elk City, ID 83525
208.842.2219 (Elk City School)
208.842.2435 (home)
208.842.2225 fax
mfunk@camasnet.com

Foxfire, Inc. (National project, headquartered in Georgia)
Bobby Ann Starnes, President
The Foxfire Fund, Inc.
PO Box 541
Mountain City, GA 30562-0541
706.746.0541 phone
706.746.5829 fax

League of Professional Schools (GA)
Carl Glickman, Chair
Frances Hensley, Director, Rural Initiative
The League of Professional Schools
Program for School Improvement
124 Algerhold Hall
University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602-7108
706.542.6551 phone
706.542.2505 fax

Llano Grande Research Project (TX)
Mary Alice Reyes, Superintendent
Edcouch-Elsa ISD
PO Box 127
Edcouch, TX 78538
210.262.2136 phone
210.262.3661 fax

Mariposa County Unified School District (CA)
Dr. William Pettus, Supt.
PO Box 8
Mariposa, CA 95338
209.742.0250 phone
209.966.4549 fax
soverstreet@mariposa.k12.ca.us

National Writing Project (National project, headquartered in Berkeley, California)
Richard Sterling, Executive Director
Elyse Eidman-Aadahl, Rural Challenge Director
National Writing Project
School of Education
5511 Tolman Hall #1670
Berkeley, CA 94720-1670
510.642.0963 phone
510.642.4545 fax
elyseea@socrates.berkeley.edu
http://www-gse.berkeley.edu/nwp

Navajo Nation (AZ)
Elmer Guy, Deputy Director
Division of Dine Education
P.O. Box 670
Window Rock, The Navajo Nation, AZ 86515
602.871.6000 phone
602.871.7474 fax
New Paradigm Partners (WI)
Chuck Ericksen, Coordinator
New Paradigm Partners/Rural Challenge Project
PO Box 86
Tony, WI 54563
715.532.7760 phone
715.532.5405 fax

North Coast Rural Challenge Network (CA)
Ken Matheson, Superintendent
Mendocino Unified School District
PO Box 1154
Mendocino, CA 95460
707.937.5868 phone
707.937.0714 fax
ken@mnc.org

PACERS (AL)
Jack Shelton
Program for Rural Services and Research
205 University Blvd., East
Box 870372
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0372
205.348.6432 phone
205.348.2412 fax
jshelton@PACERS.org
http://www.pacers.org

Partnership Rural Initiative in Maine (ME)
Dr. Lynne Miller, Executive Director
David J. Ruff, Project Director
117 Bailey Hall
Gorham, Maine 04038
207.780.5498 phone
207.780.5315 fax
smp@usm.maine.edu

Program for Rural School and Community Renewal (SD)
Dee Hopkins
College of Education and Counseling
Box 507, Wenona Hall
South Dakota State University
Brookings, SD 57005-0095
605.688.4198 phone
605.688.6074 fax
SmallfiA@mg.sdstate.edu

REAL Enterprises (National project, headquartered in North Carolina)
Rick Larson, Director
115 Market Street, Suite 320
Durham, NC 27701
919.688.7325 phone
919.668.7621 fax

Santa Fe Indian School (NM)
Glenda Moffitt
Planning and Evaluation
1502 Cerrillos Road, Box 5340
Santa Fe, NM 87505
505.989.6321 phone
505.989.6317 fax

Schleicher County (TX)
Hal Porter, Superintendent
Schleicher County ISD
205 Field Street
Eldorado, TX 76936
915.583.2514, x. 221 phone
915.853.2695 fax

School at the Center (NE)
Jerry Hoffman, Paul Olson and Jim Walters, Project Directors
119 Henzlik Hall
Center for Curriculum and Instruction
PO Box 880355
Lincoln, NE 68588
402.472.6395 phone
402.472.8317 fax
72652.427@compuserve.com

Southern Initiative of the Algebra Project (MS, AL, NC, SC)
David Dennis
Positive Innovations, Inc.
5135A Galaxie Drive
P.O. Box 13917
Jackson, MS 39236-3917
601.362.0144 phone
601.362.5788 fax

Stewards of the High Plains (CO)
Betty Moellenberg, Jim Rittenhouse, Ruth Nicolaus
25253 County Road 8
Idalia, CO 80735
970.354.7343 phone
970.354.7416 fax
moellenb@rmi.net

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The Rural Challenge on the Internet: How to Use Our Web Site

Have you found the Rural Challenge site on the World Wide Web? If you haven't yet tried getting onto the Internet, here are a few basic tips that can get you started sharing the good works of Rural Challenge partners with each other and the outside world.

First, some basics. Most people find information on the Internet by using a navigational system called the World Wide Web. The Web presents "pages" of text, graphics, and audio files you browse through (or "surf") using a "Web browser" software application like Netscape Navigator 3 or Internet Explorer 3. (These differ only in minor details; both are available free, and have e-mail functions you can also use. The Rural Challenge Web pages work equally well with Version 4 of both.) You can also access the Internet through America On Line (AOL), either by following the links it provides or by using AOL to make the basic connection, then Netscape Navigator or Internet Explorer to browse the Web. Simply by clicking your mouse on highlighted sections of any Web page, you can move from one page to another, download software, view movies, or hear sound files.

Your computer can connect to the Web by dialing out through a modem to an local Internet Service Provider (ISP), a company that maintains a major connection to the Internet for individuals to use. Ask friends who use the Net to recommend an ISP they like. Your ISP is an excellent source of help as to which browser you should choose, how much memory your computer needs to run it (a lot!), and how to set up your modem and other equipment.

Once you have your browser open, you will need to enter some settings so it can deal with Macromedia's Flash and Java/Javascript, which will give you the best experience possible in the Rural Challenge Web site. First, go to our site by typing into the appropriate box our "Universal Resource Locator" (URL) name, which is:

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Partners Directory *continued from page 6*

Tenn-GA-Lina (TN, GA, SC)
Phillip A. Kiper
Van Buren County High School
P.O. Box 278
Spencer, TN 38585-0278
615.946.2442 phone
615.946.2733 fax

Texas Interfaith Education Fund (TX)
Carrie Laughlin
Texas Interfaith Education Fund
1106 Clayton Lane, #120W
Austin, TX 78723
512.459.6551 phone
512.459.6558 fax

Tillamook County Education Consortium (OR)
Ed Armstrong
c/o Tillamook School District
6825 Officers' Row
Tillamook, OR 97141
503.842.2558 phone
503.842.6854 fax
ed@tillamook.k12.or.us

Vermont RuraL Partnership (VT)
Sue Mahoney, Director
c/o Vermont State Department of Education
120 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620
802.828.3125 phone
802.828.3140 fax
smahoney@doe.state.vt.us

Warren County Selborne Project (PA)
Mark Baldwin, Selborne Project Coordinator
Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History
311 Curtis Street
Jamestown, NY 14701-9620
716.665.9620 phone
716.665.3794 fax
mark@rtpi.org

Yampa Valley Legacy Education Initiative (CO)
Paul Sachs, Project Coordinator
P.O. Box 773554
Steamboat Springs, CO 80477
970.879.4296 phone
970.879.3943 fax
fullmoon@cmn.net

Yuba Watershed Alliance (CA)
Tonie Hilligoss
P.O. Box 185
Camptonville, CA 95922
530.288.3451 phone
530.288.0508 fax
hilligoss@oro.net

Print Resources Available

The Rural Challenge national office has the following published resources available:

- *Challenge Journal*, "What Rural Schools Can Teach Urban Systems" (vol. 1, no. 2)
- "Challenge to the Nation: A Progress Report" (February 1998)
- " Toward Place and Community," the latest evaluation report written by our Harvard University–based evaluation team and edited by Vito Perrone.

To receive copies of any of these resources, e-mail us at ruralchallenge@rkymtnhi.com, specifying your name and mailing address along with which and how many of these you need.

Money and Connections

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of rural schools, teacher development, technology use, the pedagogy of place, standards, charter schools, and vouchers. We need to fine-tune our vision and spotlight the strengths and uniqueness of the rural movement, and also to illuminate how urban and rural efforts complement each other.

And we must raise the visibility of this movement, building bipartisan cooperation through a private and public partnership with a public policy element. Many of those I speak with are familiar with education but not in the rural context, or have not focused on life beyond cities and suburbs. I am working to educate a wide circle of friends and potential collaborators, using our convening powers and the media to reach decision makers including foundations, corporations, politicians, leading citizens, and the general public. We aim for a national program with efforts in every region to benefit rural communities. Through many partnerships, we will take this movement from the school to the community, to the state house, and to the nation's capital.

Using Our Web Site

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http://www.ruralchallenge.org. When the site opens to its title page, go to the menu at the top of the screen and make a "bookmark" or "favorite" of this page; then click the "Download Flash" button at the bottom of the page. Step-by-step instructions will come up on your screen, including the most important step, "Install Flash." Restart and check these settings to be sure your Java and scripting are activated:

If you are using Internet Explorer, go to Edit—Preferences—Java; the box next to Java should have an X. The other Preferences settings under Web Content/Active content are X'd by default.

If you are using Netscape Navigator, go to Options—Network Preferences—Languages, and make sure the boxes for Java and Javascript are both checked.

"Surfing" the site. Starting with our title page, several key areas will link you to internal pages; or you can simply hit the large ENTER graphic to reach the "home" page. To avoid going back to the entry page each time you visit the site, you can "bookmark" as many internal pages as you wish, and when you want to return, choose the bookmark or favorite from the menu. Poke around, have fun, make new friends—you can't break it!

To find out more about browsers or computer requirements, you can visit the site http://www.tcigd.com/doc/may98web-browsers.html.

For definitions of technical terms, follow the link to "cool sites" from the Rural Challenge page, then click on "TechWeb Technology Encyclopedia."

In the next issue of Rural Matters, we will explain more of the functions of the Web site, notably the Communication Center and calendar areas, chat and discussion groups, and how to use the calendar and post events. Content additions from the field are welcome; we encourage you to correspond with our Content Administrator, Betsy Kroon.

Throughout the summer Rendezvous, our On-Line team members will be very active, offering classes for anyone who wants to learn how to get on line and earn their "Surfin' Star." See you there or on the Web!

rural matters

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The Rural Challenge News Fall 1998

Schools serving their communities, communities serving their schools

Court Deals Blow To Rural Schools, But Leaves Hope

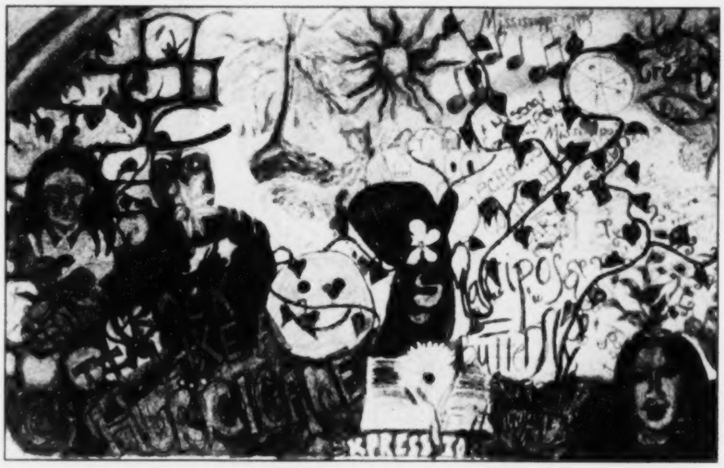
by Marty Strange

Overturning a lower court decision, the West Virginia Supreme Court has ruled that a school district's decision to close a rural school and send its students elsewhere, and the financial incentives to do so offered by the state's School Building Authority, do not violate the state's constitution. But the decision left room for other outcomes if enough good evidence could be offered about the educational importance of leaving school children in their small communities.

Parents and others in Circleville, West Virginia had argued that closing their small school against the wishes of the community and busing the children long distances to a consolidated school discriminated against those students by denying them equal access to high-quality

continued on page 4

> *“Such factors as size and location cannot be ignored in determining whether a state's educational system provides equal access to a ‘thorough and efficient’ education.”*



The mural created by Rural Challenge partners at the Summer Rendezvous in Granby, Colorado on June 24 through 27, 1998 symbolized the breadth, beauty, and diversity of both the gathering and the movement. Above, a section of the colorful whole.

Resources at the Ready for Rural Community Connections

by Marylyn Wentworth

When people are determined to integrate their schools and communities and to move toward place-based education, connections to resources become very important. The Rural Challenge's Capacity Building and Connections program is working on a plan to sponsor programs and connect rural schools and communities to a variety of such resources—an emerging inventory through which rural schools and communities may locate providential, life-expanding possibilities.

We urge you to investigate these resources and to add to our list with others you've found helpful. For young people who have access to community agencies, projects, and people, the walls of a school building need no longer define the source of their learning.

Here are a few resources with which to start the inventory:

The Corporation for National Service (CNS) sponsors three programs, any one of which may offer opportunities that mesh with local work. To find out more about any of these, call CNS (202-606-5000) or visit its Web site at www.cns.org; or call your state's Governors Commission on Service. CNS programs include:

Learn and Serve America, the national service learning program;

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Ready Resources

continued from page 1

The **National Senior Service**, which includes a retired volunteer service; and

AmeriCorps, a national service program whose sponsors include national, state, and local nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education. To meet the specific needs of their communities, programs recruit and train people who devote at least a year to AmeriCorps, improving their communities by working on environmental, economic, educational, and social programs. It is possible to design AmeriCorps programs that directly address your school and community needs. Contact your state's Governors Commission on Service for information, or visit the AmeriCorps web site (www.Americorps.org).

> *"For young people with access to community agencies, projects, and people, the walls of a school no longer define the source of their learning."*

Many Rural Challenge partners could take advantage of the **Natural Resources Conservation Service** of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, whose offices in most counties across the nation offer schools a variety of educational services about natural resources. The York County, Maine office, for example, has curriculum materials for conservation learning, provides people with special expertise to assist with projects and studies, and sponsors a local, state, and national Envirathon competition in which field-based youth teams address problems related to local soils, forests, wildlife, and watersheds.

In addition to educational programs, all Natural Resource Conservation Service sites have specific conservation grants in local areas, many of which have opportunities for young people to participate in real conservation work. In Maine, for example, they conduct several watershed-related programs. Look for your local Natural Resource Conservation Service in the phone book under U. S. Government, Agriculture.

In every state, Land Grant Colleges sponsor outreach programs called the **Cooperative Extension**, which have long served farms and communities with information and resources. Many people do not realize how much this agency has changed in recent years. In addition to agricultural assistance, it sponsors youth and family programs and programs supporting sustainable agriculture and natural resources. Each Cooperative Extension program is tailored to the needs of the counties it serves, so all are a bit different. York County, Maine has ten programs that serve youth and families (including AIDS education, an environmental camp, nutrition and food safety, and self-esteem and gender socialization programs) and several sustainable agriculture programs (including composting, training of master gardeners, insect and plant disease identification, and marketing from home businesses). Cooperative Extension services appear in the phone book under each state university's listing.

Many private groups also offer assistance to rural schools and communities. The **National Center for Community Education (NCCE)**, a program of the Mott Foundation in Flint, Michigan, sponsors local and national workshops to provide "state-of-the-art leadership development, training, and technical assistance focusing on community and educational change emphasizing community schools." This year includes a series of six-day intensive community education orientation workshops. Participants pay a $175 registration fee and transportation costs to Flint, Michigan; NCCE provides free lodging and most meals. Workshop dates are November 2–8, 1998; February 1–6, 1999; April 18–25, 1999; and July 12–17, 1999. For more information contact NCCE at 1017 Avon Street, Flint, Michigan, 48503, or call 810-238-0463.

rural matters

Rural Matters: The Rural Challenge News is published quarterly from the national headquarters at:
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ruralchallenge@rkymtnhi.com

The national staff of the Rural Challenge includes:
Paul Nachtigal and
Toni Haas (co-directors),
Jack Hills, Linda Martin,
Mike Taylor, and Betchen Wolf.

We welcome articles and letters for consideration but regret that we cannot return manuscripts without stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

Web site: www.ruralchallenge.org

Tales from the Rural Challenge: A Call for Papers

The place-based pedagogy that is at the core of the Rural Challenge is increasingly seen as a means toward revitalized schools, strong communities, and a sustainable future. Now Rural Challenge educators have an opportunity to present their work in this area in a collection of essays to be called *Tales from the Rural Challenge: The Pedagogy of Place at the Seoncdary Level*, to be edited by Thomas Dean, Assistant Professor of Multidisciplinary Studies at Moorhead (Minnesota) State University and Linda Martin, researcher and writer for the Rural Challenge.

Suggested by the publisher Heinemann Boynton Cook, the collection will present examples of Rural Challenge pedagogy at the secondary level in the disciplines of English, language arts, history, and social studies. Rural Challenge teachers are invited to submit 500-word proposals by October 30, 1998, summarizing the place-based work or curriculum, theoretical or philosophical base, and results. If the book prospectus is accepted, completed essays will be due to the publisher in spring 1999.

Essays should include descriptions of place-based, contextually rooted work as well as sample course designs and assignments grounded with rich descriptions of what happened when the work was implemented: successes, failures, and mid-course corrections. Samples of student work are welcome (but must be accompanied by release forms, whatever their length), and sample syllabi may be included as an appendix. Essays should reflect the theories and philosophies of place-based rooted education and explain why the curriculum was designed as it was.

Direct inquiries to either Linda Martin at the Rural Challenge, P.O. Box 1569, Granby, CO 80446 (tel.: 970-887-1064; e-mail ljm@rkymtnhi.com) or Thomas Dean at New Center for Multidisciplinary Studies, Moorhead State University, 1104 7th Ave. S., Moorhead MN 56563 (tel. 218-236-2955; fax 218-236-2168; e-mail deantom@mhd1.moorhead.msus.edu). Proposals should be sent to Thomas Dean.

Notes

from the National Office

The Rural Challenge Board of Directors, meeting at Harvard University in space arranged by Vito Perrone and Carla Fontaine of the evaluation staff, has made some important decisions that we want you to know about. First, the Board reconfirmed its decision to create a permanent organization to succeed the Rural Challenge after our contract with the Annenberg Foundation expires in June, 2002. It agreed that the new organization will be governed by a national Board of Trustees, numbering between 13 and 21, who will serve rotating three-year terms. The current Board will begin rotating off the Board in June, 1999. Second, the Board elected Jack Murrah, our current Chair, for an additional two-year term.

The Board also reviewed and approved an operating plan and budget for fiscal year 1999. This plan integrates the work of our programs in policy, connections, development, grants, and communications into a synergistic whole. It articulates our mission as "to improve rural communities and their schools" and our goals as "more places, better practice, and a better climate." We continue to look for language that describes clearly what we are about, and "rooted education" is nudging out "place-based education" to describe our approach. What speaks to you?

As part of looking for the right language, we've engaged a firm to find us a Director of Communications and intend to fill that position this year. If you know someone who would be wonderful at sharpening our messages, enlivening our publications, and creating platforms for sharing the Rural Challenge with the widest possible audiences, have them call Rhyan Zweifler at (312) 322-0088.

—Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal, Co-Directors

Policy Matters

West Virginia Supreme Court Finds Against Community School

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education. (See *Rural Matters*, Spring 1998.)

Needed More Evidence

But in reaching this decision, the Supreme Court left the door open for more cases on the matter. The community's claim was not supported by enough evidence that other children forced into consolidated schools over the past 20 years had suffered "overall disparities and discriminatory adverse effects," the court ruled. Even if such effects could be found, it concluded, the West Virginia policy of closing small schools—over 250 in the past eight years—served "compelling state interests," including the need to spend limited funds economically, to offer enhanced curricula and good facilities, and to produce equal educational opportunities throughout the state.

If the discriminatory effect of consolidation against rural children could be shown, the court suggested, and evidence offered that another policy could achieve those compelling state interests, then the forced consolidation might be unconstitutional.

This case signals the growing rural unrest in the wake of changes in state school finance policies adopted to achieve equity, usually measured as equal per-pupil expenditure. State legislatures are being asked to sort out the complex relationship between school size, per-pupil cost, and quality education in both rural and urban settings. This is the first lawsuit to clearly and crisply address the issue of what "equal access" to a quality education means when the evidence is that bigger is not always better for the student, and "quality" does not cost the same everywhere.

The Case for Small Rural Schools: What the Lower Court Found

Some major findings from Judge Tod J. Kaufman's November 1997 lower court decision in Pendleton Citizens for Community Schools v. Marockie, et al.:

The Circleville School is the social, cultural, educational, and recreational center of the North Fork Valley, and its closure will have a serious adverse effect on the life, spirit, and economy of that community.

Substantial time spent traveling on a school bus or otherwise commuting contributes to student fatigue, seriously intrudes on students' time for study and for participation in extracurricular activities, and generally has a significant, negative impact on the quality of the students' education.

Students from families with a lower socio-economic status generally perform better in smaller schools and in schools within their own communities, where they can enjoy more opportunities to participate in the life of the school, have a more dependable support network within the school, and receive more parental involvement. Small school size helps to blunt the negative impact of poverty on educational achievement. Large schools are not just dysfunctional for poor children; such schools dramatically compound the disadvantages that poor children inevitably confront. Increased school size does not correlate positively with educational quality or educational outcomes.

The large majority of students do not benefit from curricular enhancements because most students do not venture beyond the core curriculum even when specialized course offerings are available; such offerings tend to benefit primarily children from families with a high socio-economic status.

Closing community schools and busing rural students to consolidated schools, especially when the bused children are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, create a significant risk of substantially increasing the dropout rate among such students.

Education in sparsely populated counties costs more than in more heavily populated counties; either the rural counties must have smaller schools . . . or they must spend more money to transport students longer distances to get to larger schools.

Size and Community Matter

In making its decision, the lower court had to reach several crucial conclusions about how the size and location of a school, the socioeconomic status of the community it serves, the role that community plays in the school, and the role the school plays in the community all interact to affect the quality and the cost of the education children receive.

The heart of this case was the lower court's finding that such factors cannot be ignored in determining whether a state's educational system provides equal access to a "thorough and efficient" education for all children.

In reversing the decision, the state's Supreme Court did not repudiate the logic of the argument; not enough evidence had been presented that the discrimination these children are subjected to causes them much harm, it held, and the discrimination did serve compelling state interests. In effect, the court said, "If you can prove this discrimination hurts kids, and there is a better way to treat everyone equally while enriching the curriculum and providing adequate facilities economically, then this kind of discrimination against rural kids might, indeed, be unconstitutional."

Warning on the Issue

Although the Circleville community lost this case, it made a point. This ruling sounds a warning to educators and policy makers. The relationship between the school and its community, the reasonable ability of parents to participate in their children's education, and the strain that busing places on children and parents are all factors that should be considered in evaluating the efficiency of a school's performance in delivering a quality education. To meet the requirements of providing equal access to a quality education, many states will have to begin to consider these views more completely, or be placed under closer scrutiny by state courts.

The mood in West Virginia itself may be shifting on this issue. Although it had supported consolidation over the years, in commenting on the Supreme Court decision one of the state's leading newspapers, the Charlestown Gazette, said that the state's "single-minded drive for large schools that meet 'economies of scale' discriminates against the needs of children in large, sparsely populated, rural counties."

In the next case, there may be the evidence the court is looking for that consolidation for the sake of saving money may hurt rural kids more than it helps them, and may therefore be unconstitutional.

> ***"The state Supreme Court did not reject the logic of the argument, leaving open the way for another case to show that consolidation hurts students and that a better way exists."***

For More on the Case

Entering this case as a "friend of the court," the Rural Challenge submitted a brief on behalf of the Circleville community. Researched by Deirdre Purdy, a third-year law school student and an expert witness in the case, the brief was submitted to the court by Judge Frank Cleckley, a retired West Virginia Supreme Court Judge who now teaches law at the West Virginia University Law School. To read the Rural Challenge brief, the West Virginia Supreme Court decision, and the Charleston Gazette editorial in their entirety, visit the Rural Challenge Policy Program web page at www.ruralchallengepolicy.org.

'Place Value' Is Now on the Shelves

Place Value, a new book written by Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal and published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, is available for purchase. Subtitled "An Educator's guide to Good Literature on Rural Lifeways, Environments, and Purposes of Education," the book challenges rural teachers to reexamine education and find ways to root it in the places where they and their students live. To request copies of the book, contact:

The ERIC Clearinghouse on
Rural Education and
Small Schools
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325
Phone: (800) 624-9120
Fax: (304) 347-0487

The cost is $12 per copy, with a 25 percent discount for between 5 and 25 copies and a 40 percent discount for more than 25 copies.

Evaluating Progress: A Visit from the Neighbors

by Linda Martin

Though the five elementary schools in Colorado's Rural Charter Schools Network are located in five unique communities, they have key things in common—they are rural, they are small public charter schools, and they have found alternatives to school consolidation by educating local students locally. This common understanding allows individual schools to step back and see their work through the honest eyes of peers—a "critical friends" approach to peer site evaluation that can honestly say, "I've been there."

> *" Five rural charter schools are creating evaluation tools that find 'rich and reliable ways of knowing what has succeeded, what has not, and why.' "*

It is risky business to ask peers to evaluate and assess our work, to truly look into what we do and what we believe. The members of the Colorado Rural Charter Schools Network have found, however, that the sense of help and caring and a common mission overrides that fear of risk; the benefits and wisdom gained makes the fear disappear.

In the interest of program assessment, Lake George, Guffey, Crestone, Battle Rock, and Marble schools created evaluation plans that accurately reflected their accomplishments and supported each other's efforts to create excellent rural community schools.

To document each school's work, the Colorado Rural Charter Schools Network uses annual two-day site visits in April and May, led by a team of five. (Each school also makes at least one student exchange visit to another school site before May.) Four members of the visiting team are selected from each of the other network schools, and include one parent, one board member, one staff member, and one administrator. The fifth member of the team comes from outside the network, and includes key Colorado policymakers. Each team's administrator serves as its facilitator.

The Visiting Process

Well before the visit, each school's administrator prepares introductory packets for each team member, including a school profile, curriculum overview, assessment results, operating budget, accountability reports, charter contract, board minutes, a list of particularly significant programs, and any additional information about the school.

Team members tour the school and interview a variety of groups, including the board of directors of the school, the school administration, staff, students, parents, and community members. On the last day, team members discuss and compile the results of their interviews and observations, then report to the school administration and staff, leaving time for questions and answers. The facilitator also compiles a final written report, which is sent to the school administrator and team members within two weeks.

What the Team Asks

The final written report answers five central questions, indicating how the team came to its conclusions in each area:

1. Is the academic program a success? An affirmative answer would be based on evidence that the school has made reasonable progress in meeting internally established annual goals, and that student performance significantly improved or is persistently strong on internal and external academic assessments.

2. Is the school a viable organization? "Yes" would mean that the school is financially solvent and stable; enrollment is stable and near capacity; school governance is sound, and professional staff are competent and resourceful.

3. Is the school faithful to the terms of its charter? If the school's program and operation are consistent with the terms of its charter, and if the school is within the bounds of essential statutory and regulatory requirements, then the answer will be yes.

4. Is the school faithful to the goals and philosophy of the Rural Challenge? If the answer if yes, it means that there is ample evidence that the school and community work successfully together to create an educational program that is grounded in a pedagogy of place; it means that education is valued as a means of rooting students in their community through place-based education, service learning, and/or entrepreneurial endeavors.

5. Does the school recognize clearly where growth is most essential, and is the total program committed to discovering areas of self-improvement? An affirmative answer would mean that whatever areas of growth are evident to the evaluators during the site visit are clearly identified as goals for program improvement by the school.

Exchanging Rural Stories, Views, and Information on the Web

Surfing the Rural Challenge Web site at this summer's Rendezvous, participants earned a Hawaiian lei at the "Surfin' Party" and became more comfortable using the information and communication features of the site, at www.ruralchallenge.org.

The Web site is a convenient "window to the world," explaining the Rural Challenge and its projects to school people and potential funders. Project coordinators should regularly evaluate what the site says about their funded projects, providing updates or links that show the authentic impact of their work.

Back issues of Rural Matters can also be found on the Web site in the section titled "About Us." And the Communication Center section offers the chance for those who want to exchange views and information to do so using "listserves" as their electronic tool.

A listserve is an automatic electronic mailing to specified people whose e-mail addresses are listed together using a single address—an ideal way to quickly share ideas with others interested in a particular topic. The listserve for planning the Summer Rendezvous, for example, allowed dozens of Rural Challenge partners to have input during its planning process. List-serves make a powerful tool to carry forward the like-minded work, ideas, and friendships that keep the Rural Challenge steaming ahead.

When you subscribe to a listserve, your name is added to its list. You can interchange mail with everyone on the list at once, or you can "lurk" on the list, not contributing messages but listening in on exchanges in areas that interest you. If you choose "digest delivery," you get one weekly e-mail with all postings, rather than receiving messages as they come in.

Ongoing listserves described in the Communication Center of our Web site include those for the Colorado region, Communities, Leading Edge, Funded Projects, Summer Rendezvous, Southwest Region, Tribal Granees, the Web site, and the Wisconsin region.

To subscribe to one of these, enter your e-mail address in the request box and click "submit"; you will get a message saying your mail has been sent. (Check your e-mail to confirm that you have entered your e-mail address correctly.) You will then start getting e-mail messages from the other subscribers, or weekly digests, depending on the option you selected. To put in your own two cents worth, simply mail a message to the e-mail address of the list. (Since you're on the list, you will receive a copy as well.)

You can change your options at any time (or you can "unsubscribe") by going back to the sign-up page in the Communication Center of the Web site and choosing different options.

You may also create a new listserve to meet your needs; contact Linda Martin at the National Office (telephone 970-887-1064).

If you have problems or questions, go to "e-mail us" on the home page, and send an e-mail to "Problems." The site is fully accessible even without downloading Flash.

Jo Thompson Is New Steward for Southeast

The Rural Challenge welcomed Jo Thompson of Greenville, Mississippi to its cadre of stewards this summer, to work with the Southeastern region, including Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina, and parts of Arkansas.

Born in Mississippi as one of eleven children in a farming family, Jo is chief executive officer of Jo Thompson and Associates, a training, staff development, and organizational development consulting firm. She is an advocate for training women to start their own businesses, establishing mentoring programs in schools, and training teachers to become better educators. Much of her work focuses on community organizing and community mobilization.

Jo sees school districts as "nuclei for community mobilization," so working with the Rural Challenge "seems like a natural match," she says, allowing her to follow up with relationships developed in the field and offer ongoing technical assistance. The Rural Challenge is "a pioneering social movement," she says. "It confirms that education is not about creating a success in school, but about creating a life."

Hotline for Migrant Workers' Families

Frequent moves over long distances to work in seasonal or temporary agriculture present migrant farmworkers and their families with a wide range of obstacles, including poverty, hazardous working conditions, substandard housing, limited health services, social isolation, and disrupted schooling.

Now the ESCORT Migrant Education office offers migrant farmworkers and their families a national toll-free number (1-800-234-8848) to call for assistance with education, health, housing, and other supportive services. The staff of the Migrant Hotline will respond to concerns and questions of migrant farmworkers and their families or make referrals to appropriate agencies or organizations.

Congratulations!

Ken Matheson, director of the North Coast Rural Challenge Network of Mendocino County, California and superintendent of Mendocino Unified School District, has been named Superintendent of the Year by the Small School Districts Association, receiving its Charlie Binderup Award.

Bringing Students, Teachers to Funders' Notice

by Jack Hills

The Rendezvous was the highlight of my five-month tenure at Rural Challenge. Students and teachers came together in dialogue sessions to discuss their progress, and we realized how much we can learn from each other's impressive accomplishments facilitated by the Annenberg Rural Challenge. I have been sharing this inspiring learning experience with prospective funders, to whom I now plan to introduce students and teachers, either by bringing funders to schools or by bringing students and teachers to them.

I continue to meet with decision-makers from the educational, foundation and corporate communities to discuss what we are trying to accomplish, and their interest continues to grow encouragingly. As we move toward the future beyond Annenberg funding, our development strategy includes a regional and national focus and a service component. We are looking to national foundations to develop the critical base of core support, with regional and corporate foundations as partners for joint funding. We are also identifying leading individuals in the country who can play a major role in moving us toward 2002.

We plan to become a resource to regional, state and local communities, serving as mentors by training and identifying prospects, and working with Bill Tomlinson and his team to develop technology, including a website, chat rooms and discussion groups.

Last, I am pleased to welcome Lon deMatties, who has taught in both rural and urban communities in Vermont and Arizona, to our Washington office to provide administrative and research support.

CORRECTION: Please add New Paradigm Partners to the "Partners in the Rural Challenge" directory in our Summer 1998 issue:

New Paradigm Partners (WI)
Chuck Ericksen, Coordinator
New Paradigm Partners/Rural Challenge Project
P.O. Box 86
Tony, WI 54563
(715) 532-7760 phone
(715) 532-5405 fax
ericksen@centuryinter.net

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The Rural Challenge News Winter 1999

Schools serving their communities, communities serving their schools

Rural Voices Will Gather On Line, Talking Standards

Whose standards matter in our schools, and why? Do small schools in rural communities have time for the slow process of developing consensus about what students should know and be able to do? And how does the "machinery of education"—school accreditation, teacher certification, building permits, federal aid guidelines, state school finance formulas—undercut the potential of locally developed standards?

Educators and community members from around the country will be tuning in from their desktop computers to discuss these issues and more with experts on rural matters in an unusual free electronic symposium in January.

> *Standards should originate in the community and be rooted in local wisdom, experience, and place. But what tough issues does this raise?*

The three-hour national meeting, a coming together of small-town America with space-age technology, is sponsored by the Rural

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Student Mike Briggs (left) with science teacher Debbie Jamieson, helping install a holding tank for fish in the Lubec High School aquaculture class. Their projects are directly tied to community revitalization.

School Project Grows to Support Community's Maritime Livelihood

by Julie Bartsch, Bill Clark, and Gloria Jenkins

Look for Debbie Jamieson's Lubec High School Aquaculture class, and most days you'll find it in a newly renovated waste treatment facility located 50 feet from the back door of the school. Inside, students are busy installing filtration and cooling systems in four new holding tanks that will soon become habitats for breeding and harvesting a variety of marine species.

These students are partners with the community in developing an aquaculture industry in Lubec, Maine, the most easterly town in the United States and a member district of Partnership Rural Initiative of Maine, a Rural Challenge partner. The class project may help restore this community's once flourishing sardine industry as well as preserving its rich maritime history.

"The Aquaculture Project is about developing the backbone of our community," says junior Sean Daye. "Whether people realize it or not, everyone is affected by aquaculture."

"Without the aquaculture industry," says Bob Peacock, the head of Peacock Canning and a graduate of Lubec High School, "my great-grandfather's factory, founded in 1928, would be idle."

In the nearly three years since Lubec became an Annenberg Rural Challenge site, its Aquaculture Project has become a model for school-community collaboration. Not only does it provide challeng-

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Connecting to the World: Seven Projects About Place

by Marylyn Wentworth

Living in rural places keeps at bay the sensory and information overload of crowded places. But sometimes the peace of rural places becomes isolation, circumscribed by the radius of a county or a region. This can be especially true for young people, who grow up longing to get away to places of action and bright lights. Connection to others in the larger world can enlarge the importance of one's home place, especially when such connections make learning exciting while contributing to an endeavor of value to both the larger world and home.

A recent issue of the journal *Green Teacher* listed some connections that can give substance to place-based learning, make use of locally collected data for understanding global phenomena, and improve the local environment while connecting to others beyond the local area. With *Green Teacher*'s friendly permission, we pass on these summaries:

Global Rivers (GREEN)

The Global Rivers Environmental Education Network (GREEN) supports interdisciplinary watershed education in 130 countries. Participants collect and analyze environmental data; study historical patterns of land and water use in their watersheds; share data, concerns and strategies with others all over the world; and develop action plans to improve their local environment. In support, GREEN provides field manuals, student activity guides, software for modeling environmental data, digital technology for field investigations, Internet-accessible environmental database technology, and a range of water monitoring kits. It offers workshops, a semiannual newsletter, and a free catalog of resources and monitoring equipment. Contact GREEN, 206 S. Fifth Ave., S-150, Ann Arbor, MI 48104; (734) 761-8142, http://www.econet.apc.org/green/.

Monarch Watch

Monarch Watch is a continent-wide network of schools and researchers who tag Monarch butterflies in the effort to unravel the mysteries of their amazing 3,000-kilometer migration. Classes pay $10 to join and receive tagging kits and monitoring instructions for use each fall. Recovered tags are posted on the project's Web site (http://www.monarchwatch.org) along with a list of regional coordinators and lots of information. Materials are in English and Spanish. Contact Chip Taylor, Dept. of Entomology, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045; (913) 864-4051.

Project FeederWatch

Participants in Project FeederWatch collect and submit data on the birds visiting their feeders between November and March. Students learn about birds and basic field research while project scientists gain valuable data. For $15, U.S. participants receive a research kit, a bird poster and other bird related information, and a newsletter full of project results and other kids to contact. Contact Cornell Lab of Ornithology, PO Box 11, Ithaca, NY 14851-0011, http://birds.cornell.edu

NatureMapping Program

NatureMapping helps students and communities create a biodiversity report card on which to base future land use decisions. Volunteers help wildlife biologists amass reliable information about habitats, wildlife, and invasive species. NatureMapping provides monitoring guidelines at its Web site, data entry software, teacher-training workshops, a video, posters, a field kit, preparatory activities, and final reports. Contact NatureMapping Program, University of Washington, Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, School of Fisheries, Box 357980, Seattle, WA, 98195-7980; (206) 543-6475; http://salmo.cqs.washington.edu/~wagap/nm

A Thousand Friends of Frogs

A Thousand Friends of Frogs started in 1995 after students in a Rural Challenge partner school discovered deformed frogs in Minnesota wetlands. Students and adults conduct frog and toad surveys, mostly in the "frog months" of April and October, and submit reports to scientists monitoring the health of

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The national staff of the Rural Challenge includes: Paul Nachtigal and Toni Haas (co-directors), Jack Hills, Linda Martin, Mike Taylor, and Betchen Wolf.

We welcome articles and letters for consideration but regret that we cannot return manuscripts without stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

Web site: www.ruralchallenge.org

amphibian populations worldwide. Students can pose questions to online experts and are encouraged to enhance their study of amphibians through art and literature. They can communicate with other students all over the country participating in the study. Contact A Thousand Friends of Frogs, Hamline University Graduate School of Education, 1536 Hewitt Ave., St. Paul, MN 55104-1284; (800) 888-2182, http://cgee.hamline.edu/frogs/index.html.

SNOW

SNOW participants throughout the continent's snow belt (usually in grades 4–6) collect weekly data on new snowfall and accumulated snow depth in January and February, post their data on a web site, examine patterns and trends, and discuss their findings with other students in the U.S. and Canada via an e-mail listserv. SNOW suggests weekly special investigations such as looking at the insulating properties of snow, provides an expert Scientists Corner, and encourages students to develop their own investigations. Contact SNOW, School Nature Area Project, St. Olaf College, 1520 St. Olaf Ave. Northfield MN 55057; (507) 646-3599; http://www.stolaf.edu/other/snap/snow.html.

Rescue Mission's Indicators

This international Indicators Project is part of Agenda 21, created at the 1992 Earth Summit as the United Nations action plan for sustainability in the 21st century. Young people assess their schools and communities on the basis of 16 indicators of sustainability. They evaluate typical environmental indicators such as atmosphere, waste, biodiversity, and water, along with social indicators such as

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Notes

from the National Office

What is "it" that the Rural Challenge is about? What can we build on? How do we know "it" works? What will it take for "it" to work for ordinary people (not geniuses)? What will it take for "it" to work in every kind of community, including those deeply divided by historical animosities, those experiencing growth or decline, communities that are persistently poor?

We need your help to answer those questions. As our Rural Challenge project directors wrestle with how we work on the ground, the Board seeks ways to explain ourselves, both to ourselves and to the world.

So far, we know, the Rural Challenge has brought together people from all over the country who share common beliefs, common hopes, and a vision of vibrant rural communities and powerful rural schools. We are just beginning to articulate those beliefs and purposes, but each time we gather, our sense of them is reinforced. We also know that no national organization is currently working at the intersection of rural schools and communities, helping them identify and address their mutual issues. And so we hope that the Rural School and Community Trust will grow out of the Rural Challenge to become that permanent organization.

The Rural School and Community Trust will need to operate on at least five levels: national, regional, community, school, and classroom. It will have some form of membership, so it will need incentives for people to become members. What would inspire you to join such an organization? What would you bring to it? What would you want from it? What are models of membership that we should consider? How might we work together to increase assets and wealth in sustainable ways in rural places?

Function best determines structure. What should be the function of the Rural School and Community Trust? How might an organization help us achieve our vision of schools and communities serving and served by one another?

How do *you* describe the "it" in your place, from your perspective? How do you know "it" works? What have you done (or thought, or seen) that makes "it" take root and grow? What have been your wild successes, your wild disasters, the cul de sacs you've discovered?

Over the next four months we'll be collecting opinions, insights, and suggestions. By the beginning of March, we'll begin synthesizing what we've heard so that we can make recommendations to the Board in April. Please let us know what you think. You can write us at the national office, e-mail us, or phone. We want to hear from you.

—Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal, Co-Directors

E-Symposium on Community Standards

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Challenge and scheduled to start at 1 p.m. Eastern time on Wednesday, January 13. Deborah W. Meier, a noted advocate of local control over school standards, will give the keynote address, and Anne C. Lewis will moderate the electronic discussion.

"Genuinely high academic standards, linked to assessments that measure a child's intellectual growth, her or his teachers' performance, and their school's effectiveness, will move mountains in the effort to restore confidence in our schools," the Rural Challenge's draft policy statement, just posted on the Web at www.ruraledu.org, asserts. "For all communities, but especially for rural communities, it is important that these standards originate in the community and be rooted in local wisdom, experience, and place."

But can communities without social and economic power carry out that grave responsibility? When the standards of state departments of education conflict with those of business, or educators, or church people, or politicians, does one group have a more important role than the others? Are "home-grown" standards more likely to be embraced by students, teachers, and school leaders? Where do standards support increased equity, and where do they divert attention from it?

Symposium organizers expect on-line debate on these and other questions from a broad audience including chief education officers, school administrators, school board members, parents, teachers, and members of the higher education and public policy community. From computer stations around the nation, participants may follow the discussion as it unfolds on their screens and tap out their own remarks, questions, and opinions in "real time."

Panelists will include Harvard University professor of education Vito Perrone, who heads the Rural Challenge evaluation team; Jack Shelton, director of the Program for Rural Services and Research at the University of Alabama, a Rural Challenge partner focusing on education and health issues; and Francisco J. Guajardo, a classroom teacher and director of the Llano Grande Research and Development project, a Rural Challenge partner in south Texas.

Grounded in the Annenberg Rural Challenge Policy Program's draft statement, "Standards in Public Schools," the electronic symposium will result in a paper to be published in print form and on the symposium's Web site (www.ruraledu.org), which will continue to host conversations on standards through March 1, 1999.

Additional information, including the draft policy statement and more background on the speakers, is currently posted on that site. To register, visit the Web site or e-mail ruraledu@together.net with "register please" in the subject line. Further information is also available at the Policy Program Web site (www.ruralchallengepolicy.org).

Limited seating for the symposium is also available at five interactive television sites: Portland, Oregon; Denver, Colorado; Lincoln, Nebraska; Montgomery, Alabama; Jackson, Mississippi; and Burlington, Vermont. For information about attending in person, e-mail rchallenge@quest-net.com.

Policy Matters

The Use and Misuse of Test Scores

by Marty Strange

As state governments across the country grapple with how to fund education, communities and policy-makers alike are looking for ways to hold educators accountable for the money spent and for the quality of student learning. Many states have turned to financial rewards and sanctions for school performance. And increasingly, they have latched on to standardized test scores as a means to compare schools to each other and even to determine how much funding schools and districts should receive.

In 1996–97, 22 states were using test scores to sanction or reward school districts, and that number is increasing. Twenty-three states give state boards of education the authority to intervene in academically "bankrupt" schools whose students score too low as a group. Of those states, ten allow students to leave low-performing schools, taking their proportional amount of state funding aid with them. Four of these states directly punish low performing schools by taking aid away from them. While some states use test scores as one of several accountability indicators, too many rely solely on scores.

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Although the potential misuse of test scores is an issue for schools nationwide, it can have an especially strong impact on small and rural schools, because of their sizes and demographics.

Much of the research on standardized testing concludes that tests can be biased against minority and low-income students. Tests generally draw from the vocabulary and experiences of white middle- and upper-class students. If racial and socioeconomic factors are not controlled for, scores may not accurately reflect student ability or aptitude. When lower test scores mean school sanctions, small communities with high poverty rates or diverse populations face serious consequences.

Moreover, in many small and rural schools only a handful of students may have taken the test upon which fiscal decisions are based. Statistically, small sample sizes are considered unreliable because too much of the outcome can be determined by chance. The results may not be representative of the quality of learning for the entire school. Small changes in the student population, such as the movement in or out of just one or two families with high- or low-scoring children, can introduce a particularly powerful bias.

Take the case of Wakefield (Nebraska) Community School, one of the member schools in the School at the Center Project, a partner of the Rural Challenge. To explain how use of standardized test scores to reward and punish schools can be unhealthy, Wakefield principal Jeanne Surface wrote to State Senator Ardyce Bohlke, chair of the Nebraska legislature's Education Committee.

Like most in rural Nebraska, she told him, the school was once racially all-white. But because of changes in the rural labor force, especially associated with a large egg processing facility in the town, about 17 percent of the local population is now Hispanic, many from Guatemala and El Salvador. The change challenges everyone in the community, but newcomers and long-timers alike are facing up to it.

"The integrity of a school, community, or country is reflected in how it treats its most oppressed people," Surface wrote to Senator Bohlke. "We are working hard to engage our entire community in the educational environment and all of our children into revitalizing our community. It goes without saying that in small places children can more readily experience democracy because they have more access to opportunities to participate. By national and international standards, I believe we are doing an outstanding job of educating our youth. Our children, I believe, have the skills to make it anywhere they choose to go. Unfortunately, however, we have heard that by state standards we are not a 'quality school.'"

The potential misuse of test scores can have an especially strong impact on small and rural schools, because of their size and demographics.

That's because, according to Surface, the school's ACT scores have fallen in recent years (though they were a full percentage point above the state average over the last five years). This year, because the scores dropped below the state average (still well above the national average), the school is no longer eligible for "quality incentive funding," a pot of aid money that goes only to high-performing schools.

Gladly facing up to the tough educational challenges a global economy imposes on small rural communities, this community has been stripped of access to the resources that might have made that job a little easier. And the basis? Test scores of the 13 children from that school who took the ACT. That is too much responsibility for those kids to bear.

Connecting to the World

continued from page 3

health, human rights, education, transportation and employment. After completing assessments, participants develop action projects for their communities. Approximately 1,000 schools in the U.S. are now using the Indicators Kit to assess local sustainability. Copies of the kit are free. Contact Rescue Mission Project, Foundation on the Future of Youth, 11426 Rockville Pike, S-100, Rockville, MD 20852; (301) 468-9431; e-mail: dpines@ health.org, or www.shs.net/rescue

Two Rural Challenge Partners Get Humanities Grants

Two schools in Rural Challenge partnerships have recently received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

On the Laguna Pueblo Indian Reservation in New Mexico, Laguna Middle School received a NEH Schools for the New Millennium planning grant, which supports the use of technology in the study of the humanities. The school, which belongs to the Bread Loaf Rural School Network, will use electronic resources to explore the intersection of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* with the history and literatures of northern New Mexico Pueblo cultures.

At Idalia School in Idalia, Colorado, a Stewards of the High Plains partner, Jim Rittenhouse received a Humanities Focus Grant for an institute for teachers and administrators, "The New Great Plains: A Colorado Perspective." Using the humanities, institute participants will trace the philosophy and sense of place of Plains residents, considering how deeply it influences their lives.

Marylyn Wentworth, who coordinates Capacity Building and Connections for the Rural Challenge, is helping organize other Rural Challenge partners to apply for the next cycle of NEH funding in October 1999. Contact her (50 Main St., Suite 258, Kennebunk, ME 04043; tel.: 207-967-2863; e-mail: ruralconnect@gwi.net) to join this exciting opportunity to broaden and deepen the work.

Maconda Brown O'Connor, Houston Advocate for Children, Joins Rural Challenge Board

Maconda Brown O'Connor, a long-time advocate for children's health, welfare and education, has been elected as the newest member of the Rural Challenge Board of Directors.

Dr. O'Connor, a Houston resident who recently received a Ph.D. in social work as a non-traditional student at Smith College, became interested in the Rural Challenge's work during a recent visit with development director Jack Hills to the Llano Grande Research Project in Edcouch, Texas. President of the board of the Brown Foundation in Houston, Texas, she has served on the boards of several institutions and agencies that target improved care for children. She is on the board of the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., and serves on the advisory board of the Brookings Brown Center for Education, which focuses on primary and secondary education in urban communities.

Currently a trustee of Baylor College of Medicine and Texas Children's Hospital, Dr. O'Connor is also a member of the Child Advocates Advisory Board, the American Leadership Forum of Houston/Harris County, the Houston Annenberg Challenge for Public School Reform, and the Children's Assessment Center Foundation Board. She remains active with clinical and research activities pertaining to children's issues. The Rural Challenge Board looks forward to her presence at its April 1999 meeting.

Technology Thrust in Development Effort

by Jack Hills

As we coordinate the Rural Challenge development plan nationally and regionally, we are developing a regional list of prospects to coordinate with the sites, as well as continuing our meetings with national foundations. To support the strong interest in increasing and understanding the use of technology, we will soon launch a task force on how technology can enhance student learning when it is used to gather and analyze data on local issues and problems.

At the recent Camden (Maine) Technology Conference, which focused on K–12 technology education, I noticed marked willingness on the part of many leaders in the industry to work with the teachers and superintendents they met there. They were particularly impressed by the knowledge and enthusiasm of our own student-teacher team from Henderson, Minnesota, which presented the Rural Challenge Web site (www.ruralchallenge.org) it maintains for our nationwide effort.

Out Soon: Harvard's Evaluation Report

The latest Rural Challenge evaluation report will be released in February. This report focuses on student work, featuring examples of students' work and including a section on ways communities and schools work together to become more integrated. The report will be distributed widely by the Harvard evaluation team. Extra copies will be made available.

School Project Supports Community's Maritime Livelihood

continued from page 1

ing real-life educational experiences for students, but it promotes economic development in one of the poorest communities in Maine.

Lubec (pop. 2,000) is beset by chronic poverty; the 1990 census showed per capita income as $8,700, and conditions have not changed much since. Highlighting the stark contrast in living standard in the "Two Maines," a recent public broadcasting program cited Lubec near the bottom and Yarmouth, a wealthy coastal community in southern Maine, near the top.

The Aquaculture Project started in 1995 with an introductory course in the middle school and a science elective in grades nine through twelve. Last year seven students enrolled. This year the enrollment stands at 37, almost 35 percent of the high school population. With support from Braine Coulthard, Lubec's part-time superintendent, science teachers realigned the curriculum to offer two more aquaculture courses in grades six through twelve.

Students learn by hands-on activities what is "out there" in the bay on which the town stands. They study the life cycle of organisms and how to raise species and bring them to market; they research solutions to actual problems. They raise salmon and sea urchins, sell baitfish during ice-fishing season, and culture freshwater species like rainbow trout.

The curriculum connects to the new Maine Learning Results mandated in science, and teachers are designing innovative assessment methods to measure student learning.

The first aquaculture center started in a large closet, where a high-school biology class and a middle-grades science class began learning about harvesting a variety of sea species, sustaining the environment, and preserving fishing practices. The lab had minimal equipment, but the project attracted attention not only from students throughout the school, but from townspeople who saw its implications for the future of the local aquaculture industry.

"Students like it because it's real," says science teacher Jamieson. "We're surrounded by water; this is part of our community."

Hank Stence, who directs Peacock Canning's special projects hatchery, has taken a keen interest in the school program, inviting students to share his research and even conduct it along with him. With Bob Peacock, he is asking the students to research the optimum stocking densities for raising different species and the most effective micro-algae for feeding the growing shellfish larvae. In his column in the local newspaper, the *Lubec Light*, Spence keeps the community informed of the students' work; and in an extraordinary act, last year this hard-strapped town voted $15,000 for a permanent center to keep it going.

Community volunteers worked with students to renovate the abandoned facility behind the school. A year later, the town voted $20,000 more to complete the job, and it recently donated 20 small aquariums for individual student research.

Superintendent Coulthard hopes the program will grow into a vocational program preparing students for careers in aquaculture. "I will tie what I've learned in the program to business management," says student Sean Daye. "The course has made me aware of more options and taught me so much about the environment. This program can help the community thrive."

In this hard-strapped seaside town, students are learning the science and economics of the fishing business, with their community's full support.

Coulthard also envisions a research center where local aquaculture professionals will work side by side with students in conducting marine research. Neighboring communities like Eastport, which has a marine studies program but could follow up with a full vocational program, might benefit from a magnet program here, he thinks. And opening the program during the summer would multiply these possibilities.

Meanwhile, students are building shelves, getting organized for visitors, and looking for a more reliable source of heat. With growing support from this community, they can be optimistic about soon having bigger fish to fry.

Julie Bartsch is the Rural Challenge steward for the Northeast; Bill Clark, a former school superintendent, coordinates the Rural Challenge project in Washington County, Maine; and Gloria Jenkins directs the Washington County Consortium.

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Rural Challenge Web Site Gets a Face-Lift

by Betsy Kroon

The Rural Challenge Online team recently finished a complete overhaul of the RC Web site (www.ruralchallenge.org), making it easier and faster to find and get information there.

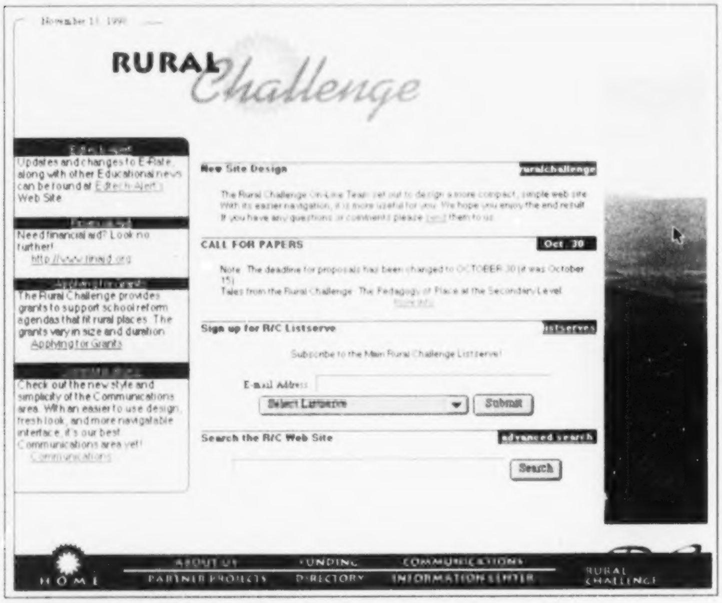
Along with making the overall site easier to navigate (Flash is gone!), the team made signing up for listserves quick and simple.

Two clicks take the user to a detailed list of every public listserve in use, and offer the chance to subscribe to each one. Listserves are a great e-mail communication tool for people spread over long distances or those "on the go."

Those who prefer fewer messages may subscribe to a listserve's digest, which compiles and summarizes each week's e-mail.

For visitors without e-mail or who prefer not to use it, the discussion boards found in the Web site's Communications area offer another way to exchange information by "posting" topics for discussion on an electronic bulletin board. After registering with a user name and password, one can communicate with people everywhere. Currently the discussion boards are not being used to capacity; the online team encourages everyone to register, post a welcome message, and say a little about why rural education is important to them.

The Rural Challenge Online team (coordinator Bill Tomlinson and students Betsy Kroon, Evan Davis, and David Krupinski of the Minnesota New Country School) is continually seeking more information on partner projects in order to better serve Web visitors. Event descriptions, success stories, and especially photographs are always more than welcome. The team received an excellent response to its recent request for URLs on the Projects listserve, and looks forward to receiving more input and suggestions.



Updates and changes to E-Rate, along with other Educational news can be found at Edtech-Alert's Web Site

Need financial aid? Look no further!
http://www.finaid.org

The Rural Challenge provides grants to support school reform agendas that fit rural places. The grants vary in size and duration.
Applying for Grants

Check out the new style and simplicity of the Communications area. With an easier to use design, fresh look, and more navigatable interface, it's our best Communications area yet!
Communications

New Site Design

The Rural Challenge On-Line Team set out to design a more compact, simple web site. With its easier navigation, it is more useful for you. We hope you enjoy the end result. If you have any questions or comments please send them to us.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Note: The deadline for proposals has been changed to OCTOBER 30 (it was October 15)
Tales from the Rural Challenge: The Pedagogy of Place at the Secondary Level
More info

Sign up for R/C Listserve

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rural matters

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rural matters

The Rural Challenge News Spring 1999

Schools serving their communities, communities serving their schools

Rural Students Will Show Work In SD Gathering

The theme of "Small Towns, Big Dreams" will focus discussion among students, educators, and community members as over 300 students from rural schools around the country gather March 31 in Pierre, South Dakota for the second annual Student Extravaganza of the Rural Challenge. The South Dakota Program for Rural School and Community Renewal and Nebraska's Schools at the Center will host the two-day conference at the Best Western Ramkota Inn Convention Centre.

Organized and led by students, the event allows youth to network and showcase recent work and accomplishments from their schools and communities as they pertain to Rural Challenge goals. Only students give presentations at this conference, which allows all attendees—students,teachers, and community leaders—new ways of viewing various subject matters and place-based curricula.

For more information, e-mail Teresa Schanzenbach (schanzet@cc.sdstate.edu) or call her at 605-688-6306.

> *High local standards, not standardization, won support from e-symposium conferees.*

A recent Colorado odyssey by senior staff revealed the energy and accomplishments of Rural Challenge partners. Here, a view of Lake Granby in Grand County, Colorado. For the story, turn to page 6.

Communities Should Own Their Standards, Rural Folk Say On Line

by John Eckman

Overcoming a few technical glitches, the three-hour "live" portion of the first Rural Challenge on-line symposium held January 13, 1999 sparked debate around the standards issue that continues online and across the country today. Over 200 people attended the video conference at seven sites and joined a broader network as more than 300 online participants in schools, offices, and homes across the country joined in the discussion.

Though opinions varied on the role of federal, state, and local input in standards, no one dismissed the value of some form of standards as a useful tool. Many participants criticized standardized testing, on the other hand, and the type of high-stakes assessment and

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Alabama Group Opposing Tracking Will Be New Rural Challenge Partner

> *The children are our hope; in them lies our victory. Our schools are the holders of our victory or our defeat. From the graves of miseducation and limitation, our children can rise. Like the phoenix, they must rise in the 21st century if we are to survive.*
>
> —from CARE's Vision

An Alabama coalition against ability tracking has received a three-year Rural Challenge implementation grant to assist its work. The Coalition of Alabamians Reforming Education (CARE), organized in 1990, has two fundamental goals: first, to raise awareness of and help change local and state policies allowing unequal preparation of school children under the guise of "ability grouping"; and second, to establish models of rural schools that exemplify the commitment to teaching all children a challenging curriculum that respects their history and culture and serves to improve the communities in which they live.

CARE's Public Education Project (PEP) utilizes an existing network of partners to educate and organize local communities about tracking and other reform issues. It prepares people at the "grass roots" to play an active role in the dismantling of ability tracking, replacing it with advocacy for educational policies and practices that challenge *all* students to achieve their highest potential.

A second CARE project, Redesigning and Innovating Schools for Excellence (RISE), works directly with rural Lowndes and Sumter County schools to create alternatives to tracking. These districts have committed themselves to specific strategies providing students with learning opportunities that help them achieve at high levels, undoing the self-fulfilling prophecies of low-ability tracking. Lowndes and Sumter County Schools will eventually serve as detracked demonstration sites for other schools in Alabama.

Both PEP and RISE provide training (with a strong emphasis on community), materials and curriculum development, and communication and networking.

CARE works toward the day all policymakers, teachers, parents, and students believe that all children can learn at high levels, regardless of race, class, or gender. It envisions schools where all children reach their academic potential, increasing the likelihood that they will reach their full potential in other areas of life. At the core of this vision is the model school, emphasizing high-powered academic leadership and cultural opportunities. Such a school would maintain a partnership with its community, evidenced not only by community involvement in school activities but also by school involvement in its community.

In California, Grant Supports Four Rural Latino Communities

A new Rural Challenge grant will combat social injustice and increase the involvement of Latino residents in the local affairs of four communities in southern California.

The Ventura County Rural Challenge Cluster aims for systemic school change. It will increase community organizing and service learning to address issues of diversity in decision-making, place-based environmental education, and employment in the local film industry.

The cluster includes the communities and schools of Fillmore, Ocean View, Ojai, and Santa Paula. It focuses on programs for community and parental involvement in schools, environmental programs, diversity programs, and economic development.

Expressing overwhelming sentiments that their history is not sufficiently represented in community life, Ojai's Hispanic community inaugurated an annual exhibit at the Ojai Historical Society with a Latino focus and featuring local Latino residents as guides.

In Ventura County, the primary

continued on next page

ruralmatters

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The national staff of the Rural Challenge includes: Paul Nachtigal and Toni Haas (co-directors), Jack Hills, Kathy Westra, Marty Strange, Linda Martin, Mike Taylor, and Betchen Wolf.

We welcome articles and letters for consideration but regret that we cannot return manuscripts without stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

Web site: www.ruralchallenge.org

continued from previous page

body of historical information in local museums currently represents the non-Hispanic record. In response, curators will now contribute to training sessions so that students can help build a permanent Latino collection at local and regional museums.

Controversial pesticide use in the growing fields surrounding Ventura County school campuses is an increasing source of local concern. With help from the Rural Challenge grant, a regional conference on environmental education will highlight the topic of environmental justice.

Finally, Ventura County community residents will tap the talents and state-of-the-art-tools of professionals in the growing film and art industries in the area. Help from local professionals will make school curricula more relevant to the needs of the most rapidly developing and stable industry in the region.

In each of these important areas, students have already done exemplary initial work and helped define the work that remains. A dedication to cooperative efforts among all community members has encouraged the Latino community to develop its leadership potential through this important Rural Challenge partnership.

OF INTEREST: Pulse of the Planet, the award-winning radio series that tracks the rhythms of nature and culture, has received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to produce and broadcast short radio modules in which listeners share the ways that they, their families, and communities observe and celebrate the seasons of the year. Call 1-877-PULSE-99 toll-free to suggest a story.

Notes

from the National Office

In local schools and communities and across the nation the work of the Rural Challenge is beginning to change the conversation about rural education. Students report that they are more excited, more engaged, and learning at higher levels. Teachers tell us that their professional lives are being enriched by this work. Community people are growing closer to their schools, and rural schools are identifying and addressing real community problems. Schools and communities in the Rural Challenge are "getting better, together." This work is only just beginning. The Board and our field-based partners want a permanent organization, the Rural School and Community Trust, to emerge from the Rural Challenge and to institutionalize its legacy.

The development program is well begun and promising. As foundations, corporations, and individuals learn about our current successes and see our plans for a transition to future work, we believe they will be more likely to invest in the Rural School and Community Trust.

The Rural Challenge reaches almost 171,000 students with the 34 major grants it has made, ranging between one and four years (the usual time is three years), and totaling $25,775,270. We have always thought of the Rural Challenge as serving small schools in isolated places, but the cumulative effect reaches as many students as any of the urban Challenges, and more than most.

The policy program continues to work unrelentingly at critical pragmatic issues in concrete ways—sponsoring original research, supporting meta-analyses of existing research, asking questions that inform the debate from the rural perspective, and helping people understand how they can influence the policy process. These strategies have proved essential to empowering rural people who once were singularly voiceless, their concerns invisible.

Very much a "vision-driven" effort, the Rural Challenge needs now to ensure that this vision is commonly understood and held as new Board members are brought on, to keep the organization true to its basic beliefs and stay its course. For the remainder of this year and next year, we aim to strengthen the Board by adding new members, including people with access to resources to support the work financially, people who make their lives in rural places and support the work philosophically, and people who represent the diversity in race, ethnicity, gender and age of rural communities. If you are interested in serving as a member of the Board, please send a resume to the Rural Challenge National Office.

—Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal, Co-Directors

Researching the "Schoolhouse Blizzard": Rural Students Awaken a Community's Historical Memory

An overheard post-office conversation about a family's beloved dead horse prompted a Henderson, Nebraska fourth-grade class to investigate the legendary "schoolhouse blizzard" of 1888 and in the process to refresh the collective memory of this small community.

The class project, which took place as part of the Program for Rural School and Community Renewal, a Rural Challenge partner, has been cited by Harvard University researchers as an example of "complex, genuine, and challenging" student work.

Fourth-graders did archival research, interviewed local residents, and dramatized the long-forgotten event before a community audience.

The project had its beginnings when fourth-grade teacher Susan Ratzlaff overheard a conversation at the local post office about the Friesen family's love of their deceased horse, Old Frank, and the blanket they had made from his hair.

On further inquiry, Ratzlaff and her students unearthed information about an almost forgotten local 1888 blizzard, in which several schoolchildren perished trying to make their way through the storm, while others were saved by finding shelter in a haystack. Intrigued because the crisis involved early homesteaders of the region (some of whom were their ancestors) and because children played a central part in it, the class set about pursuing details about the storm.

In the process, students would go out into the community to work with a variety of people. They called on the Nebraska state historical archives, Internet databases, and oral accounts. They engaged in historical, archival, and genealogical research; interviewing; computer research and design; playwriting, art, and theater production.

Standard academic disciplines —English, spelling, vocabulary, communication, computer technology, research, and careful, even poetic writing—were naturally integrated as students examined passages of old journal entries and accessed remote databases to untangle genealogical information, search out new source material, and correspond with agencies and scholars who assisted their work.

The seven-month-long interdisciplinary project contributed a critical element to the community museum, Immigrant House, and it also got students deeply into the story of the immigrant, religious, and agricultural history of the town. Their culminating public presentation, a theatrical reproduction of the event, filled the Heartland-Henderson auditorium with over 400 townspeople, almost half the town's population.

"Perhaps a measure of the success of any learning activity," observed a recent report from the Harvard University–based Rural Challenge Research and Evaluation Program, "is how engaged the students are in continuing the inquiry, building on the core of information they have acquired even after the predetermined activity has officially 'ended.' When

Work That Matters to Students and Community

Most Rural Challenge work has a project base and demands that students actually *do* something—engage in a performance, complete a multifaceted task. This doing tends to be complex and, in this regard, it is work leading to understanding. It is work defined by students, teachers and parents as challenging. It is also work that matters to those doing it. When it matters, it tends to be seen as genuine work, of high quality, easily distinguishable form routine school work. A strong sense of reciprocity between school and community is evident, with students often making real and lasting contributions to the community while community members, many of whom have no direct connection to the school, enter into the schooling process in a more substantial way than is typical.

—From "Living and Learning in Rural Schools and Communities," a report of the Rural Challenge Research and Evaluation Program, Harvard University, March 1999.

students want to know more, to pursue a path of exploration they find particularly interesting, a spark for ongoing inquiry and lifelong learning has been successfully ignited."

Such was the case with Ms. Ratzlaff's class, the report noted, as students insisted on pursuing the name of one person involved who was known only as "the hired man." Relentless in trying to determine his identity and background, they searched records, journals, newspapers, and finally the graveyard in their successful attempt to name the unknown man.

The entire experience, the Harvard researchers concluded, presents a vivid example of how Rural Challenge schools serve their communities just as the communities serve the schools. "Though fragments of the story had survived in the oral traditions of a few local families," the report concludes, "the public telling inspired a communal recognition of the impact natural occurrences such as weather have on the lives of people historically tied so closely to the land, so dependent on the elements for their livelihood."

The account is adapted from from the Rural Challenge Research and Evaluation Program's latest report, "Living and Learning in Rural Schools and Communities," to be released in March 1999 by the Harvard University evaluation team.

West Virginia Schools, Community Join as Stewards of Local Agriculture, Economy

Four West Virginia county school districts will get help in their efforts to protect the long-abused physical and cultural features of their communities, through a Rural Challenge implementation grant, the first in that state.

The West Virginia Stewardship Collaborative includes four county school districts on the eastern side of the state—Grant, Hampshire, Mineral, and Monroe—and the Lightstone Foundation. Their partnership evolved over the past four years, building on Lightstone's long-time advocacy of sustainable agriculture and local community economic development in one of the poorest states in America.

Three summers ago Lightstone began working with county high schools and vocational centers on watershed management, natural resource conservation, and sustainable economic development.

The new Collaborative will work to make watersheds and their communities a curricular focal point for community-based experiential learning.

It aims to create stewardship among all students and community stakeholders of their natural and human resources, to improve the environment and enhance the quality of life. And it hopes to strengthen and promote social and economic capital in the community.

Reframing the state and national emphasis on "school to work" as "school to community," the new Stewardship Collaborative seeks to persuade the West Virginia Department of Education that its approach to learning responds to Senate Bill 300, which mandates enhanced linkages between communities, schools, and vocational preparation.

Policy Matters

- High test scores don't always help, Harold Elementary School in Floyd County, Kentucky recently found. One of the smallest and least politically powerful schools in the county district, Harold ranked in the top ten area schools on the basis of its student scores—but that didn't stop the state from closing it down to save money. The decision was made by a board controlled by state department of education appointees named to run the district due to financial mismanagement.
- Voters in Nebraska rejected a constitutional amendment cutting spending for schools and locking in place the state's excessive dependence on the property tax. A coalition that included many partners in the Rural Challenge's School at the Center Project and its affiliate, the Nebraska Alliance beat back the attempt by some Nebraska business interests to pass the amendment. The vote split about 60–40, despite proponents' spending about $10 per voter to sway the results.

Colorado Odyssey Shows the Impact of Rural Challenge Funding

by *Jack Hills, Vice President, Development and Kathy Westra, Director of Communications*

A week-long February tour of Rural Challenge projects across Colorado let us see first hand the incredible difference a place-based philosophy of teaching and learning can make for students, their teachers, and their communities. The trip was organized by Rural Challenge co-directors Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal, several Rural Challenge project coordinators, and Rural Challenge steward Sylvia Parker, with help from a host of teachers, principals, community members, and students.

We started in Granby's Middle Park High School, where Rural Challenge funding gives an interdisciplinary team of teachers crucial time to develop a place-based high school curriculum that will debut this fall. In nearby Steamboat Springs, second-grade students read us their descriptions of their trips to nearby Carpenter Ranch, a Nature Conservancy property and working cattle ranch that serves as a focus for teaching about land use in the Yampa River watershed. And at Strawberry Park Middle School, students were preparing musical and dramatic performances to illustrate their community's history and their families' historic ties to the Yampa Valley.

We met with students at the Steamboat High School who were studying the mysterious "blow-down" of thousands of acres of trees in a nearby National Forest wilderness area. After visiting the site and studying the blow-down's ecological consequences, these students played a key role in the public process of recommending management options to the U.S. Forest Service—choices that will have a major impact on the future of the forests in their own community. What began as a study of forest ecology had blossomed into a powerful lesson in civic involvement.

In Hayden, teachers and community members were planning a "Legacy Evening" performance. We visited the Carpenter Ranch, where Rural Challenge funds helped start a community education partnership program with Yampa Valley schools.

Our last morning in the Yampa Valley began with Dr. Cyndy Simms, the schools superintendent whose support of Rural Challenge projects has been key to their success. Through her leadership, citizens of Steamboat Springs approved a half-percent sales tax that funds advanced computer technology and Internet access in the Yampa Valley schools.

In Yampa, we listened with a group of students as a local woman talked about her girlhood in a mountain cabin without electricity or running water and her regular walks of more than 20 miles over rough mountain terrain. She ended each colorful reminiscence with the words, "and that's the way that one turned out." How much more meaningful and memorable it was for these students to learn first hand about their town's history, rather than reading facts in a textbook.

Our next stop was the tiny quarry town of Marble, where Rural Challenge funds help support a charter school of two teachers and 16 students from kindergarten through eighth grade. These students would otherwise travel 35 miles from their home and community to attend school. Marble's school is one of five in the Colorado Rural Charter Schools Network, whose director, Ginny Jaramillo, we later met in Lake George.

Leaving the mountains, we traveled through flat, nearly treeless vistas to the high plains near Colorado's northeastern border. Joined by Sylvia Parker, the Rural Challenge steward for all the Colorado partnerships, we met Betty Moellenberg, who directs Stewards of the High Plans, a Rural Challenge coalition of three small schools in Fleming, Julesburg, and Idalia.

We spent the day at the Idalia School with teacher Kristi Minor, principal Marie Norby-Loud and their students, all full of enthusiasm for the school's place-based curriculum. From their book publishing project on the town's history to the community garden and greenhouse they are building, these students exemplified the excitement and pride of place that a locally relevant curriculum engenders.

The schools we visited shared passionately committed teachers, administrators, and students working collaboratively and across disciplinary areas. All need more time to develop programs and to share what they have learned. All enjoy strong community involvement and support. All use technology, the performing arts, real-life scientific investigation, and creative writing to infuse the students' work with meaning. All shared a concern about public policy issues—particularly state education standards and school consolidation. And all shared the desire to work collaboratively on securing funding to address common concerns, and to share the results of policy research.

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Where Do Standards and Real Learning Intersect?

continued from page 1

accountability strategies now being championed by the Clinton Administration and most state education agencies, for creating unproductive pressures to "teach to the test" rather than providing meaningful learning.

While offering commentary on the Rural Challenge's Draft Policy Statement on Standards (available at the Web site www.ruralchallenge.org), the e-symposium also accomplished its purpose of raising more questions than it answered. A few highlights:

"Our children are not 'products,' their work is not an 'outcome,' their purpose is not to be 'tools' in a larger global competition. How they grow up is a matter as much of habits of the heart as habits of the mind—neither of which is much in evidence in the schools of today or the ones the well-intentioned fixers have in mind for tomorrow."

—Deborah Meier, keynote address

" . . . No matter how we couch standards (or who makes them), the *measurements* of the standards are—and I fear will continue to be—used by the media, and by the general public(s) to compare *district* to *district* or *state* to *state* rather than appropriately comparing achievement and progress of individual students to meeting standards set in each district. The whole accountability initiative (not saying that accountability is not needed) seems to have gotten out of hand and appears to be counterproductive to keeping good teachers and administrators on primary tasks of teaching!"

—Online participant
Mary Travillian, Iowa

"The 'external standards' that can energize teaching and learning are standards for quality that are inherent in the field of work students engage in. In this sense, whatever work students create has to meet standards of excellence—in both content and presentation.

For example: If students are doing a study of water quality, herbicide use, soil erosion, development patterns, forestry, or radon gas in their community, the external standards of value to their learning are the standards that apply to the work processes and final products of environmental scientists, sociologists, biologists, chemists, and planners.

If students are preparing a history of certain aspects or time periods of their communities, one that will end up in the local library or historical society, external standards that apply are those that apply to the work processes and products of historians, demographers, interviewers as well as of writers, video producers, map makers, and photographers.

If students are writing plays, novels, or autobiographies, or biographies, and if they want to produce work that is worthy of placing in the school or public library for others to see, students need to understand the standards that define excellence in writing, researching, illustrating, and publishing. If students are lobbying for changes in local ordinances, for establishing a land trust, or for introducing county or state legislation governing migrant labor, school buildings or budgeting, or other areas of concern to them, the external standards that can foster learning are those that characterize the work of ethical and effective lobbyists, lawyers, advocates, and organizers."

—Online participant
Anne Wheelock, Vermont

> *"The 'external standards' that can energize teaching and learning are standards for quality that are inherent in the field of work students engage in."*

"High standards are good. They are and have been coveted by most educators. The quest for them in the present atmosphere is generating powerful policies and practices that often seem to be too simple, too centralized and generally unquestioned. To succeed, the movement for higher standards must engage and be informed by local schools and communities; it must recognize the competence and concern of the majority of teachers; it must do justice, not harm, to children of poverty.

—Jack Shelton, Panelist, Alabama

"Will standards become the tool that focuses education on passing the test, or the catalyst that leads to dialogue between all parties involved—students, educators, and parents/community members?"

—Online participant
Amina Shahid-El, North Carolina

To read the archives of the symposium and continue the conversation, visit <www.ruraledu.org> on the World Wide Web.

RC On-Line Student Team to Graduate and Move On

As they prepare for graduation this May from the Minnesota New Country School, a Rural Challenge partner through the Center for School Change, Betsy Kroon, Dave Krupinski, and Evan Davis have mixed feelings. For the past three years, the three have served as the Rural Challenge Online team—creating, maintaining, and refining the Rural Challenge Web site, to make communication between projects quicker and the distance between people seem a little bit less.

The students carry out their work in Henderson, Minnesota (population 746), in the rural Minnesota River Valley where New Country began as a public charter school five years ago. But their work has brought them into close contact with other small-town students as well as educators working toward Rural Challenge goals around the country.

"Living in this small community can make you feel insignificant and different, when all you see on television and in movies are big cities," says Betsy Kroon. When she went to the first Rural Challenge Summer Rendezvous in Colorado, she was relieved to find "other kids who live and go to school in towns so tiny they don't even have stoplights!" Also refreshing, she adds, was sharing their genuine interest in improving the quality of school and education.

The technological work of creating the Web site also expanded these students' horizons. "When I began working on the site," says Dave Krupinski, "I was computer illiterate in comparison with what I now know." Working closely with Bill Tomlinson, a Minneapolis communications expert, and Gary Leatherman, a design and layout specialist, he acquired the basic skills required to construct the site. "Then I was allowed to run amuck on my own," he says. "While I was developing skills at my own pace, trying out new ideas and learning from mistakes, I was always a phone call or an e-mail away from Bill or Gary."

"This whole experience has done an incredible job of improving my confidence with using computers, along with increasing my interest in them," says Evan Davis, who acts as system administrator of the site. "I retain information better when I actually do something with it." Setting up the computers and servers and configuring software and hardware taught him far more, he says, than "just reading about it in a manual." And when the primary server's hard drive crashed and his backup tape proved defective, the mistake taught him a lesson he will not soon forget.

All three students hope to use their experience in college and beyond—the boys as computer scientists, and Betsy as a journalist. "You can be sure each will make use of the skills they acquired because of the Rural Challenge," their mentor, Bill Tomlinson, observes. "It has expanded their interests as well as their skills."

This article was prepared with the assistance of Betsy Kroon.

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The Rural Challenge News Summer 1999

Schools serving their communities, communities serving their schools

The Shannon County Student Dance Group from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota performs a traditional Lakota dance at the banquet of the spring 1999 Student Extravaganza in Pierre, South Dakota.

Small Towns, Big Dreams Converge

In Wakefield, Nebraska students are researching the history and architecture of their county's old barns. Wessington, South Dakota students documented their one-room schoolhouses on videotape, interviewing those who taught there. In the Texas border towns of Edcouch, Elsa, and La Villa high school students conduct oral histories with their Spanish-speaking elders, translate them, and publish a regular bilingual journal including text, photographs, and artwork. In Henry, South Dakota, students write letters to state and national lawmakers advising them of needs in their rural communities.

All these and dozens more projects from Web sites to health fairs were among those presented when over 420 students and adults from 14 states and the District of Columbia gathered in Pierre, South Dakota on March 31 for a two-day showcase of student work on the theme of "Small Towns, Big Dreams."

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"A Lamb at School" Spells Learning for 75 Navajo Children

by Jane Lockard

On the Navajo Reservation in Chinle, Arizona, in the four corners area of the Southwest, 75 students at Chinle Primary School have spent the past year studying sheep.

Along the way, they have also learned plenty about reading and writing, mathematics and scientific investigation. But just as important, guided by parents, teachers, and community members, these children are absorbing the language and traditions of their native culture.

Working with the Navajo Nation's Learn in Beauty Project and with help from a Rural Challenge grant, Chinle Primary School is designing and implementing a rigorous, integrated, thematic curriculum rooted in place, traditional philosophy, and the Dine language.

Sheep are very important in traditional Navajo life, for example, but some of our young children do not have much experience with sheep. Using the Arizona state standards in mathematics, science, language arts, and the Dine language, teachers worked to design thematic units, lesson plans, and activities that would help children learn about sheep.

We used the experts of our

continued on page 3

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Students Share Ideas and Show Their Work at Extravaganza

continued from page 1

Organized and led by students from Rural Challenge communities, this second annual South Dakota–Nebraska Student Extravaganza constituted an important opportunity for rural youth to share their accomplishments among a network of likeminded people. The next such event will take place on March 27 and 28, 2000.

"This was one of the most educational experiences of my lifetime," commented Liisa Nixon, a junior at Frederick High School in Frederick, South Dakota, which belongs to the Program for Rural School and Community Renewal. "The business ventures and educational opportunities that were shown were amazing. It was awesome to see teenagers being so patient about their problems when they made mistakes."

She went on, "The greatest part of this experience was realizing how important being from a small town is to me. The one thing that I will never forget is that we all thought of ourselves as 'those who lived way out in the middle of nowhere.' I was not alone."

Other students contributed the following impressions:

"I was able to meet a lot of new people and to see just what they were doing with their Rural Challenge grants. They had small businesses started and health walks for children. One of the groups restores old barns." *—Megan Hensley, freshman at Central High School in Wartburg, TN (Walden's Ridge Cluster)*

"I learned that here in Morgan County [TN], we have a lot more than we think. I'm very proud I attend a rural school here and can help make it better for the students of the future." *—Jason Massengill, junior at Coalfield High School in Coalfield, TN (Walden's Ridge Cluster)*

"I did not believe that there were rural communities in places such as California and New England. We should be thankful for our small communities and their interaction with the schools. I received a lot of ideas about how the Walden's Ridge Cluster could be improved." *—Charles Campbell, junior at Coalfield High School in Coalfield, TN (Walden's Ridge Cluster)*

"The presentations I attended were very well organized and showed examples of the many creative and innovative ideas students have had an opportunity to participate in, due to Rural Challenge grants. Everyone who went [will] never forget the times we shared singing, dancing, and learning with one another." *—Emily Roettger, sophomore at Central High School in Wartburg, TN (Walden's Ridge Cluster)*

"The mistakes and successes of the many student-led projects were helpful in planning or suggesting our own projects and businesses. Many of the lessons are life lessons that will be remembered all of my life. It was very fun getting to know other teenagers from other states and other towns in our state. Coming from a small hometown, it was extremely interesting to see that there are actually other people that live in small towns." *—Rachel Inches, junior at Frederick High School in Frederick, SD (Program for Rural School and Community Renewal)*

"I saw different ages, different area schools and all kinds of projects. But all these people had a few things in common. They were all young and full of ideas, also they are all from small schools. . . . My friends and I all met new people, and we are still keeping in touch. I'll definitely go next year because I know I can learn, teach, have fun and make lifelong friends." *—Traci Potter, sophomore at Wakefield High School in Wakefield, NE (School at the Center)*

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The national staff of the Rural Challenge includes: Paul Nachtigal and Toni Haas (co-directors), Jack Hills, Kathy Westra, Marty Strange, Linda Martin, Mike Taylor, and Betchen Wolf.

We welcome articles and letters for consideration but regret that we cannot return manuscripts without stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

Web site:
www.ruraledu.org
www.ruralchallenge.org

A Lamb at School

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community as traditional consultants to assist children in learning about shearing, caring for sheep, weaving and butchering. We took children beyond the school walls to sheep camp where they could experience this for themselves.

We designed mathematics lessons, asking children to measure the weight of wool and how many gallons of water a water tank held. We taught reading and writing, as students read *Who Wants to Be a Prairie Dog*, by Ann Nolan Clark, and *Charlie's Cloak*, by Tomi De Paola. Children used the scientific process to come up with a hypothesis about what color the wool would be when we dyed it with different Native Plants. And slowly, but importantly, we found ways to teach students the Dine language.

This is challenging work. But if we are successful in being able to model the possibilities of both learning within our community, within our language and within our traditions and reaching high standards in the educational world, we will be able to transform education for our communities.

If you visit Canyon De Chelly this summer you might find some of our Rural Challenge students measuring erosion caused by the stream cutting through the river bed, or discussing how the wind smoothed the tall sandstone cliffs. You'll find their teachers learning right beside them, designing thematic units for young Navajo students to learn mathematics, science, language arts, and the Dine language as they explore the riches of the Canyon.

Jane Lockard is Title I facilitator at Chinle Primary School.

Notes

from the National Office

Summer is a time for reflection on the school year just passed, for rededication to the young people of America, for our calling as adults who help them grow and learn, and for making plans for the next year. As we look back this summer on what we have accomplished together as partners in the Rural Challenge and look forward to the new school year, we hope you take some time to congratulate yourselves on jobs well done. This is difficult, patient work. We hope you find ways to meet with like-minded colleagues and plan opportunities to grow, personally and professionally.

Research on growing social movements suggest important elements to their success. First, they must clearly articulate their philosophies, principles, and theories of action so people can decide for themselves to join in the effort. Second, they must make connections among people who share those ideas. Third, they must provide opportunities for people to act together. This year the Rural Challenge is sponsoring a series of regional meetings rather than a single national Rendezvous, so more people can gather and plan new ways to work. We hope you will contribute to regional meetings, make personal connections, and together find renewed strength, encouragement, and joy in our shared work.

At the end of our fourth year, the Rural Challenge has made 38 grants and is sponsoring work in 33 states. Our grants range from Alaska to Maine, California to Georgia, and support work at the state and local level that improves rural schools and communities, impacts policy, and invigorates public engagement in education. A new category of networking grants has just been approved by the Board, to encourage existing Rural Challenge partners to work together. We are supporting work in more than 700 schools and communities, and reaching more than 170,000 students.

June 2000 marks the end of our grant-making program and our own retirement. Our attention is shifting to creating a new organization, the Rural School and Community Trust, to permanently carry on the policy and public engagement work begun with Ambassador Annenberg's generous support. We expect to launch the new organization next fall with a gala public event; stay tuned.

You can keep up with all our activities via this newsletter, but for up-to-the-minute research, grant opportunities, news, events and meetings, and publications, please check out our Web site, which is moving to www.ruraledu.org.

Meanwhile, enjoy the summer. Get outside and experience the genius of your place. Practice living well where you are. And in the words of that rural philosopher, Garrison Keillor, be well, do good work, and keep in touch.

—Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal, Co-Directors

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ENDLESS JOURNEYS:
A Rural Citizen Takes the Long Bus Ride to School

by Dolly Withrow

Despite the lime-green foliage of late April, gray clouds offered a dreary, overcast day. Before the evening was over, though, I would be glad for the cool air. At three in the afternoon, I parked my car on the lot beside the Jackson County Board of Education building.

Like a giant yellow caterpillar, a long line of school buses had already begun forming. I was scheduled to ride No. 35.

The driver asked me to sit directly behind him. One does not argue with Willie Lewis on his bus. Twenty-two riders from Ripley Middle School were already on the bus as we waited for the high school students to join them. All would be transported to their homes in Southern Jackson County. In fact, more than 500 students are bused every school day from Ripley to Southern Jackson County, many riding as long as three hours daily. I wanted to ride with some of them to see how such long trips affected them and to discover their thoughts of the seemingly endless journeys.

Part of the results of school consolidation: youngsters who arrive at school travel-weary and get home hungry and hot at day's end.

At its various stops I moved around the bus, receiving stories told in the wide-eyed innocence and honesty of youth, stories that belie statistics, stories of real situations and experiences, stories that should influence open-minded decision-makers more than the bottom line, more than the dollar. "Children first" is the motto. Children first.

I could barely hear the murmur of soft-voiced conversations, and I occasionally noticed students as they glanced my way, wondering why I was riding the bus. At one of the first stops, the driver satisfied their curiosity by introducing me and explaining my purpose for being there. He told them I was helping to obtain funding for the construction of a new middle school in Southern Jackson County. They cheered. Little did they know how slim my chances were. I had certainly been told often enough. One boy said, "They closed our middle school."

I said, "I didn't know Southern Jackson County ever had a middle school."

"Oh, yes, Sayre Elementary had grades one through eight," said another boy.

Still another chimed in, "Yeah, they should never have closed that school. It was our middle school. They took it away from us and now we have long bus rides instead."

I learned that consolidation — the tarnished goddess of a few misguided educators and decision-makers—had already had her day in Jackson County. I was witnessing part of the results: travel-weary students whose ability to perform their best academically had to be adversely affected.

"You should be on one of these buses when it's hot. They're sure not air-conditioned," said a brown-haired boy sitting across the aisle.

"Yeah, when it gets really hot, we almost burn up."

I asked about Bus No. 1, a bus I was not permitted to ride because of crowded conditions.

One student said, "Hey, three kids sit in each of those seats. I rode that bus, so I know. You put two big kids in a seat, and there's no room for a third. They stick out in the aisles and everything. I've seen 'em even sit on the floor. That bus ride is bad."

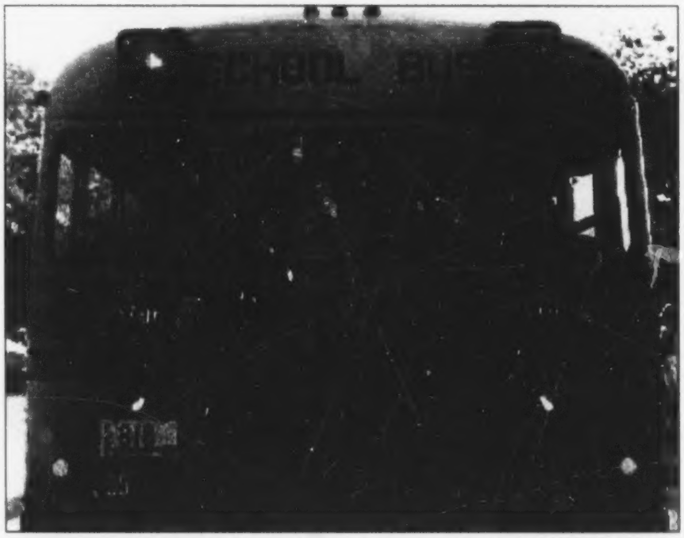
I knew after the last student left the bus, I would long be haunted by the young, wise passengers, tired from traveling long distances before arriving at school and "starved" and even more weary after arriving home in the evening. I would be haunted by the faces of decent, clean-cut children who had been deprived of a fair chance to attend a middle school in their own community.

When, I wondered, would we really put children first instead of dollars and numbers and excuses. When would the motto become reality? As I walked to my car, the April day was still overcast and dreary, even more dreary it seemed.

Dolly Withrow lives in Jackson County, West Virginia. This story originally appeared in her local paper, the Jackson Herald.

Policy Matters

How Does School Busing Affect Kids' Academic Achievement? Rural Challenge Research Project Will Seek Answers



For many rural students, the school day starts and ends with bus rides that leave them too tired to learn.

Rural citizens across America are concerned about the time students spend riding school buses—hours spent away from home, school, and family. The Ford Foundation's generous $98,000 gift to the Rural Challenge Public Policy Program will support research on the effects of long bus rides on the lives of children attending rural schools.

Nationally, 60 percent of all schoolchildren ride a bus to and from school daily—and rural children account for about three-fourths of the passenger-miles, we estimate. In the most remote areas, these distances can be staggering. Children on the Navajo Reservation ride as much as 4.5 hours per day on the bus.

With the Appalachian Education Laboratory, the Rural Challenge Policy Program has convened a panel of education research scholars to outline a vigorous research agenda. Through the Ford Foundation's generous grant, the Public Policy Program will commission several research projects to learn:

☐ What effect does substantial time traveling on a school bus have on student fatigue, on students' time for study, for participation in extracurricular activities, and on the quality of the students' education?

☐ What is the effect of school size on the performance of students from families with a lower socio-economic status?

☐ What is the effect on student performance of students attending schools within their own communities? Do students who attend schools within their own communities enjoy more opportunities to participate in the life of the school, have a more dependable support network within the school, and receive more parental involvement?

☐ What is the effect of closing a community school and busing rural students to consolidated schools, especially when the bused children are from lower socio-economic backgrounds? Does such action create a significant risk of substantially increasing the dropout rate or reducing academic achievement among such students?

For more information, including more on busing history and prior research as well as interesting anecdotal information about current practices and its effect on children, see "Long Rides, Tough Hides: Enduring Long School Bus Rides," a Rural Challenge white paper by Policy Program associate Belle Zars. It can be found under "Publications" on the Policy Program's website, www.ruraledu.org.

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Local Press Connections Vital in Spreading Rural Challenge Work

by Kathy Westra

Good local coverage of our partners' work remains the best vehicle for generating national recognition of our place-based school reform movement. At the Rural Challenge project directors meeting in February, many partners expressed an interest in learning more about working with the media at the local and regional level. Later this year, we plan to produce a handbook for our partners giving the basics of local media relations and suggestions for presenting feature and news story ideas to reporters.

The success of the Rural Challenge's external communications program ultimately depends on good internal communications with our partners. If you have a newsworthy story to share, please let us know. Contact communications director Kathy Westra at 808 17th St. NW, Suite 220, Washington, DC 20006; telephone (202) 955-7177; fax (202) 955-7179; or e-mail westrake@bellatlantic.net.

Reporters are intrigued by our partners' approach to learning in rural places. Among those who are considering stories are ABC News and National Public Radio. Perhaps the most exciting media inquiry to date was an April call to the Idalia School in Colorado from a producer for the Oprah Winfrey Show, who had heard about the work being done by our Rural Challenge partner group, the Stewards of the High Plains. We worked with project director Betty Moellenberg to develop brief background pieces to "pitch" the story to the producer.

The communications effort has received a substantial boost with a $169,000 grant from the Annenberg Foundation, which will support media outreach, Web site development, production of collateral materials, regional media briefings, development of a video about the Rural Challenge, and other important public engagement activities.

The main Rural Challenge Web site will combine with our Policy Program's Web site this summer, when the students who have managed the main site graduate from the Minnesota New Country School in late May. Evan Davis, Betsy Kroon, and Dave Krupinski have ably guided the Rural Challenge's online presence from idea to reality during the past three years, with their adviser, Bill Tomlinson. Beginning in late June 1999, all information will be accessible at www.ruraledu.org.

As the Rural Challenge begins its transition to become the Rural School and Community Trust, our communications program is gearing up to help spread the word to our partners, current and potential funders, the media, and the general public. For example, we are developing a list of national and regional media contacts, including education and regional-interest writers likely to be interested in our work.

We aim to announce the new organization and its work to these audiences in fall 1999, when the new president of the Trust will also be named. Watch the next issue of Rural Matters for the new logo that will accompany the transition.

Communications Director Kathy Kathy Westra joined the Rural Challenge's national staff in December 1998. She shares a Washington, D.C. office with Development Vice-President Jack Hills and his assistant, Lon DeMatties.

Rural Challenge Regional Meetings, 1999

March 31–April 1	South Dakota Student Extravaganza, Pierre, SD
April 14	Wisconsin Student Work Demonstration, Tony, WI
April 29–30	Pacers Annual Conference, Montgomery, AL
May 6–8	New England Regional Meeting, Bethel, ME
May 13–14	Appalachian Regional Meeting, Bristol, VA
June 22–24	Minnesota Conference, Brainerd, MN
June 28–30	Northwest Regional Meeting, near Soda Springs, CA
July 13–15	Upper Midwest Regional Meeting, Ashland, WI
August 5–7	Southwest Regional Meeting, Flagstaff, AZ
August 11–13	CO Planning Meeting for December Regional, Jackson, WY
September 10–12	Southeast Regional Meeting, Birmingham, AL
October 15–16	Native Sites Meeting, Oklahoma City, OK
December 2–3	CO Regional Meeting, site to be determined

For further information regarding the regional meetings, contact your Rural Challenge steward or call the National Office at (970) 887-1064.

Wisconsin's Rural Students Help Take Place-Based Schooling Philosophy into the Public Forum

In an intensive effort perhaps unique in the nation, rural students from around Wisconsin are helping launch a campaign to spread the ideas of the Rural Challenge throughout their state.

Known as the Wisconsin Rural Challenge, the initiative grew out of other Wisconsin projects currently funded by the Annenberg Rural Challenge. It is the first such grant explicitly supporting a statewide initiative to strengthen rural schools and communities and provide a unified public voice for the Rural Challenge vision.

The project also stands out for its reliance on young people themselves to carry out much of that work. Students are planning for several state youth conferences and will attempt to influence media, legislation, and public opinion over the next two years.

Network of Support

Among their goals are to create a youth network and a community media project, to provide technical support to Rural Challenge "incubator sites," and to make links with public policy initiatives.

They will also form public engagement teams in each region of the state to create community dialogue about creating "genuinely good, genuinely rural schools and public institutions, serving and served by their communities," the philosophy of the Annenberg Rural Challenge.

Ultimately, the project aims to influence not just rural but urban communities to improve the quality of their learning environments.

Students Are Vital

The Wisconsin Rural Challenge began with the statewide Wingspread Conference on rural school reform, held in fall 1997 in Racine. Since August 1998, when its Rural Challenge grant was awarded, students from rural communities around the state have met several times to get the initiative up and running.

Seventy-five participants came to a planning session at the Central Wisconsin Environmental Center in Amherst Junction, Wisconsin, on November 18 and December 8, 1998. In February 1999, delegations from across Wisconsin gathered for a two-day steering committee meeting at Sugar Creek Bible Camp near Viroqua.

Together the students and their adult advisers hammered out a framework for the work of the initiative, which aims to "create, support, and sustain rural learning communities that prepare young people to live well in place."

By interconnecting students, communities, and the environment, they hope to expand learning opportunities beyond the walls of rural schools. As responsible, contributing, and fulfilled citizens, they believe students can enhance the vitality of their communities rather than leave in search of better chances elsewhere.

Media Effort Planned

To spread this message, the group made plans to reach the public through community forums, radio, informational brochures, and other media.

It will use the Internet, for example, to communicate both within the group and with those outside it. And it plans a series of radio talk shows across the state.

Finally, the WRC will designate as "landmark sites" schools and communities that are working toward its goals of the WRC, providing them with additional support and advice.

For further information about the Wisconsin Rural Challenge, contact Mary Rosser at 715-924-4548.

Information for this article was contributed by students Aaron Rogers (of Birchwood, Wisconsin), Nicque Ormston, and Alex Schoele (both of Chetek, Wisconsin).

Students brainstorm at a WRC planning meeting. (Left to right) Melanie Rosser of Chetek, Audra Pfannebecker of Birchwood, and Jenna McGrath of Turtle Lake.

Review

The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society, by Lucy R. Lippard (New York: The New Press, 1997).

For those whose work occurs at the intersection of learning about land, history, culture, and place, I strongly recommend Lucy R. Lippard's book, *The Lure of the Local.*

On the one hand, this is almost a coffee-table book. Its 175 illustrations (mainly black and white photographs) tell powerful stories by themselves. On the other hand, the work is also mind-candy, skillfully and comprehensively weaving elements of cultural study, history, geography, and art in exploring community, land use, perceptions of nature, how humans interact with the landscape, and how landscapes influence our lives.

Though not a "how-to" book for teachers trying to develop a sense of place through community-based curriculum, it will make you smarter about what you do. Inspiring vignettes are threaded throughout the text, which establishes interesting connections between art and its political, social, and cultural contexts by taking us to communities in Maine, New Mexico, Colorado, and New York City.

—Douglas S. Fleming

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

From the Rural Challenge National Office
Telephone: 970-887-1064
Web: www.ruralchallenge.org *or* www.ruraledu.org

Living and Learning in Rural Schools and Communities: A Report to the Annenberg Rural Challenge. Rural Challenge Research and Evaluation Program, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Learning Matters. Annenberg Challenge brochure, March 1999.

Place Value: An Educator's Guide to Good Literature on Rural Lifeways, Environments, and Purposes of Education, by Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal.

Rural Matters: The Rural Challenge News. Back issues; also available electronically at www.ruralchallenge.org; click on "About Us," then on "Rural Matters Newsletter."

"What Rural Schools Can Teach Urban Systems," by Kathleen Cushman, in *Challenge Journal,* Vol. 1, No. 2.

The Lingo of the Annenberg Challenge, by Kathleen Cushman. This layperson's guide decodes the terms and jargon that school reformers use in Challenge sites around the nation. Also available in Spanish.

From the Rural Challenge Policy Program Office
Telephone: 802-728-5899; Web: www.ruraledu.org

Rural Policy Matters: Rural Challenge Newsletter on Rural School and Community Action, Rural Challenge Policy Program.

Standing Up for Community and School: Rural People Tell Their Stories, by Bradwell D. Scott for the Rural Challenge.

Title I and Ed-Flex: A Primer, by the Rural Challenge Policy Program, April 1999.

The Latest E-Symposium Proceedings Update, Rural Challenge Policy Program.

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News from the Rural School and Community Trust **Fall 1999**

Schools serving their communities, communities serving their schools

Rachel Tompkins, the new President of the Rural Challenge, now called the Rural School and Community Trust.

West Virginian Rachel Tompkins To Lead Rural Challenge into New Era

The Board of Trustees of the Rural Challenge has appointed Dr. Rachel B. Tompkins as the new President of the organization, effective October 1, 1999. A native West Virginian, Tompkins has long worked on behalf of children, schools, and communities. She succeeds Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal of Granby, Colorado, who will retire after having jointly led the organization since its founding in 1995. Tompkins has served as Vice Chair of the Rural Challenge board during that time.

"We're tremendously pleased that Rachel Tompkins has accepted our invitation to lead the Rural Challenge into the future," said Jack Murrah, Chairman of the Board of Trustees. "Her career in organizational leadership, rural education, and community development is well matched to our mission, and her service on the Rural Challenge board has prepared her well to move us forward quickly."

Tompkins currently is Extension Professor for Community, Economic, and Workforce Development in the West Virginia University Extension Service in Morgantown, WV, where she provides leadership training and technical assistance to community-based networks and non-profit organizations. She previously has served as adviser to West Virginia Governor Gaston Caperton (1994–96), as Associate Provost for Extension and Economic Development and Director of the Cooperative Extension Service at West Virginia University (1984–94), as Executive Director of the Children's Defense Fund (1982–84), and as Executive Director of the Citizens Council for Ohio Schools (1976–82).

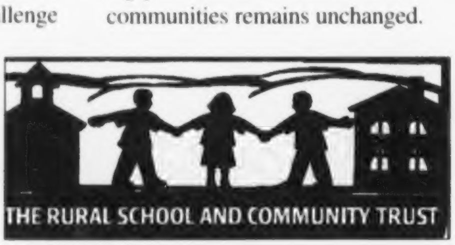
Tompkins received her doctorate in administration, planning, and social policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She also holds a bachelors degree in biology from West Virginia University and a masters degree in public administration from Syracuse University's Maxwell School.

A New Name for a New Century: Rural School and Community Trust

As the Rural Challenge prepares to make its final round of grants under the five-year contract with the Annenberg Foundation, the Board of Trustees is working to plan and ensure the organization's future. One major change, which takes effect on October 1, is in the name of the organization. After much thought and deliberation, the Board has decided to change the name to the Rural School and Community Trust. Because the name Annenberg Rural Challenge has been associated so closely with grant-making, which will no longer be a part of our mission, the Board felt that it was critical to establish a new name and a new "look" for the organization as it continues beyond the original Annenberg funding.

The name Rural Challenge will no longer be used and a new logo will appear on all materials. While the name is new, however, the organization's commitment to advancing place-based education in rural communities remains unchanged.

The new logo (right) of the Rural School and Community Trust will replace the former Rural Challenge designation on all official publications, including its Web site and letterhead.


THE RURAL SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY TRUST

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From the New President: A Rural 'Mountaineer' Takes the Reins

by Rachel Tompkins

Paul Nachtigal (left) and Toni Haas (right) are turning over leadership to Rachel Tompkins (center).

I begin this new adventure as President of the Rural School and Community Trust with thanks to the Board for their confidence and high hopes for the work all of us will do together. Although I have served on the Board of the Rural Challenge from its beginning, I have much to learn about the work we are doing in hundreds of places across the United States; but I bring useful skills and experience.

I am a West Virginia mountaineer and have lived most of my life in that state. My Dad was a rural Methodist minister after a first career as a farmer and small-town banker. Mother wanted to be a doctor when she graduated from high school in 1927; but something called the Depression, parents in ill health, and three younger sisters brought her home from college after one year. She became a teacher in one-room schools in Pocahontas County and substitute-taught and tutored for 50 years. The Rural Challenge Evaluation team has no corner on stories of rural schools; I grew up with them.

It will come as no surprise that my sister Margaret is a teacher, just retired after more than 30 years as high school librarian in Ravenswood, WV, and that my work and study for all my professional life has centered on children, schools and communities. My parents believed in the value of education, not only for economic and social mobility but for being a good citizen and good parent and for enabling one to have interesting ideas. They would have understood the Rural Challenge.

An Advocate for Change

My education and career have taken me back and forth to my West Virginia mountains. I lived and worked in Cleveland and Washington, D.C., running an education advocacy group and working for the Children's Defense Fund. I returned to West Virginia in 1984 to lead the WVU Extension Service, where I had started work years before.

In all of these jobs I have either been building an institution or trying to change it, valuable skills and experience for this job. I have raised money in every way imaginable, from holding bake sales to asking major foundations and wealthy individuals to support projects. I have advocated for change in unfriendly places, where

continued on next page

rural matters

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We welcome articles and letters for consideration but regret that we cannot return manuscripts without stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

Web site:
www.ruraledu.org

From the New President

continued from previous page

I won a few, lost a few, and survived criticism. I have done the tedious, thankless tasks of building organizational structure—good board relationships; budget and personnel policies; open decision-making processes; communication systems that give everyone the information they need when they need it; and tough, honest, fair feedback and evaluation processes. I need to do these tasks again here.

'Distinctly Rural'

You will see me in your places and your meetings over this next year. One of the real joys of this job for me will be to learn about all the places of America in which we work. We will figure out together how to build upon the incredible generosity and faith in public education of Ambassador Annenberg and on the energy, talent and hard work of people who have been part of the grants program. Our statement on standards and our research on student achievement in small schools will support local places on tough policy issues and plunge us into the national conversation on these issues with a distinctly rural point of view. The strategic plan and the proposals we build from it will secure our financial future.

Christopher Ogden, author of *Legacy*, the recently published biography of Moses and Walter Annenberg, reports that Walter always responds to "How are you?" with "Grateful and hopeful." Not a bad motto for me and for all of us as we enter the 21st century.

Notes

from the National Office

Four years ago the Rural Challenge began life in Granby, Colorado with some notions and beliefs about the fundamental relationship between rural schools and communities and how learning for rural children might be made more powerful while serving public purposes. Walter Annenberg's generous $50 million gift gave this embryonic effort the resources and the credibility to grow rapidly into the most significant rural school and community reform effort in recent history. While the national office helped schools and communities across the country think differently about public education, at the local site these ideas and beliefs were shaped, polished, and brought to life by teachers, students, administrators, and community members. The richness of this work has been well documented by the evaluation team in its most recent report, *Living and Learning in Rural Schools and Communities*.

Here in Granby, this four-year journey has became a part of our every waking hour as well as the focus of many a nightmare. Establishing an organization from scratch, administering a $37 million grants program, initiating the policy and communications program, and finding ways to keep the board, the widely scattered staff, and the thousands of participants at the local level "headed generally west" has been quite a trip—to say nothing of raising the 50 percent private "match" our contract with Annenberg requires! Particularly in recent months when this last issue has been problematic, your patience and flexibility about grant payments represents the kind of support for the common good that we need as the next phase of the work begins.

So the two of us have mixed emotions as we hand off this work to Rachel Tompkins and to a national board whose make-up will change as the Rural Challenge takes permanent form as The Rural School and Community Trust. We are pleased with the growing amount of good work in the local sites. We leave the grants program close to completion; its portfolio represents the best work in the country and particularly reaches into low-income and minority communities. We are disappointed not yet to have found the private match needed to fully draw down Annenberg's $50 million pledge. And we will miss you, but as with children who leave home, the work of the Rural Challenge will always be a part of our lives.

We will now pick up our lives where we left them, on the mountainside overlooking Lake Granby. And, borrowing the words from our favorite rural sage from Lake Wobegon, we count on you to "be well, do good work, and keep in touch."

—Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal, Outgoing Co-Directors

On Passing the Torch: A Farewell to Paul and Toni

by Jack Murrah, Chairman
Rural Challenge Board of Trustees

With divided feelings of both gratitude and regret, I hope you will join me and the Board of Trustees in thanking Paul Nachtigal and Toni Haas for their extraordinary and fruitful leadership of our enterprise, and in welcoming Rachel Tompkins to the harness this month.

The passing of this torch is momentous because the work of Paul and Toni has been definitive. It is swift but not sudden, because they helped us prepare for their departure long before it was to happen, and they stand ready to continue to serve the cause in other ways in the future. Most of all, this passage is graceful, because they themselves are possessed of grace.

> *They developed a network of places engaged in community-based education that has grown to encompass roughly a quarter of a million students.*

Paul was selected in 1995 by the founding Board of the Rural Challenge to serve as the organization's first and foremost leader, upon the approval of its contract with the Annenberg Foundation. He quickly and happily turned to Toni to join him in the effort, and they have shared leadership duties since 1996.

No new organization could have been more fortunate in attracting their combination of skills and qualities to the tasks that lay not before but upon us, and ever more heavily upon us with each passing month of the Challenge. For the record's sake, as much as for theirs, we note here some of Paul and Toni's achievements:

- They created a national office to coordinate the complex financial and operational responsibilities of the largest private initiative ever launched on behalf of rural schools and communities.
- They developed a network of places engaged in community-based education that has grown to encompass roughly a quarter of a million students within four years.
- They allocated resources rationally and purposefully to those places that collectively represent not only the best of place-based education, but also some of the toughest of circumstances under which it is being done.
- They established a policy program aimed outright at building the political capacity of rural communities to design education as a community development resource, and to design community development as an educational resource.
- They advanced unifying relationships among countless parties whose experiences, priorities, principles, powers, and places were sufficiently different to make almost inescapable a variety of conflicts, misunderstandings, and difficulties.

None of these achievements has been easy, nor has any been flawless, but all have been pursued with great intelligence, diligence, and care. Thanks to Paul and Toni, a considerable legacy of rural educational development will be handed along now to new leadership. Their devotion and stamina have ensured a constancy of purpose throughout the constant evolution of the Challenge program.

Development Office Seeks $4 Million by Year's End

by Jack Hills
Development Office

The past few months have seen more meetings with foundations, corporate leaders, and individuals interested in rural education and communities. The challenge remains the same — to ensure that these decisionmakers are aware of our efforts. The reception from prospective donors continues to be positive, and many have asked to see the strategic plan outlining the mission of the Rural School and Community Trust and its vision for the next four years.

Development of that plan, an internal document intended to guide our work over the next few years, has been a truly collaborative effort. The Board of Trustees has taken an active role, as have the senior staff, stewards, and project directors. We are now in the process of fine-tuning it for public consumption. Our goal is quite simply stated: to generate a minimum of $4 million in gifts and pledges by December, and an additional $7.4 million by June 2000.

Our discussions with several Fortune 500 CEOs, major foundations and individuals leave us opti-

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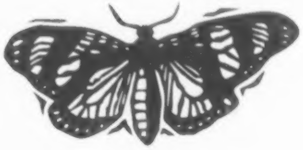
Board Adds Four Members, Three Retire As Shift to New Organization Begins

Four new members were elected for three-year terms to the Rural School and Community Trust's Board of Trustees at the board's August meeting in Chicago. The new additions to the board reflect the Trustees' desire to add significant education policy and field experience to the leadership of the Trust.

Arthur C. (Art) Campbell is Deputy Under Secretary for Policy and Planning at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He brings to the board more than 20 years of public and private experience working with cities, towns, and rural areas on community-based housing and economic development. A native of Waugh, Alabama, he holds a bachelors degree in architecture from Tuskegee Institute and a masters degree in city planning from the Georgia Institute of Technology.



Linda B. Martin comes to the board with a wealth of experience in education and grassroots organizing experience in rural communities. Currently she is director of Challenge West Virginia, a Rural Challenge–funded project dedicated to changing state school policy by forming a statewide organization to maintain and improve small community schools. Linda holds a bachelors degree in social work from West Virginia State College, and a masters degree in sociology from Marshall University.

Raymond J. (Ray) Barnhardt is co-director of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative, a Rural Challenge partnership with the University of Alaska and the Alaska Federation of Natives. Ray's distinguished career as an educator spans more than 30 years, and ranges from his first job teaching mathematics in a large urban high school to his current work with Alaska Native populations. He holds a bachelors degree in mathematics from North Dakota State University, a masters degree in education from Johns Hopkins University, and a Ph.D. in anthropology and education administration from the University of Oregon.

Ginny Jaramillo brings a lifetime of work as an educator to her current role as project director of the Colorado Rural Charter Schools Network. With the help of Rural Challenge funding, six rural Colorado charter schools have organized into a support network for rural communities resisting consolidation of their schools. Ginny holds a bachelors degree in linguistics from the University of California at Berkeley, and a masters degree in counseling from Chapman College. She has done postgraduate work at the University of Colorado and the Bread Loaf School of English.

Three Trustees retired from the board at the conclusion of the August meeting. **Marty Strange, Patricia Locke,** and **Robert Woodruff** completed their terms on the board, and were presented with resolutions of appreciation for their years of devoted service to the organization.

Minority Student Advocacy Group Gets Policy Help

A Georgia education advocacy group for minority students has received a Rural Challenge policy grant to assist its work. The Center for Children and Education (CCE) was started by the legal community, civil rights organizations, churches, and community organizations in Georgia as an avenue for addressing education issues for minority students such as dropout and suspension rates, disproportionate labeling in gifted and mentally retarded groups, the achievement gap, and facilities needs.

CCE's comprehensive and multi-pronged approach to addressing school problems includes community organizing, leadership development, peer learning, technical assistance, direct services, policy analysis, and networking support. With a main office in central Georgia, CCE serves 22 rural counties and has recently hired an organizer for a cluster of counties in Southwest Georgia. CCE encourages community members to come together to work as a group on the most pressing local school issues, providing assistance and an ever growing network of other groups who are doing similar work. Together, and now with the help of the Rural Challenge, these groups are beginning to have an impact on local and state policies.

Students Record the 'Voices of the Valley' in Their

Eight seventh-grade students on the Northern California coast have joined the ranks of oral historians by producing a book and compact disk that collects and preserves the stories of their elders. Titled *Voices of the Valley*, the project connected these young people with the older citizens of Anderson Valley, in the process giving them an important link to their community's past.

Students designed and directed the Oral History Project from the very beginning, coached by Mitch Mendosa, the Anderson Valley Coordinator of the North Coast Rural Challenge Network. They began by studying oral history and reading previously written oral histories of their area. They then decided whom to interview, making up an initial list of over 100 names.

The students quickly saw the importance of interviewing people from the many diverse groups within the community. The number of community members who speak Spanish as a first language has greatly increased in the last 20 years, for example, and Spanish-speaking students now represent 50 percent of the student population in Anderson Valley schools.

The student staff also focused on recognizing recent historical changes in Anderson Valley and taking notice of the land and natural resources around them. The economic base in Anderson Valley has shifted, for example, from logging, sheep ranching, and apple farming to grape growing for wine production and a few small businesses. Interviewing elders who represented these different groups let students more accurately represent Anderson Valley life both past and present, seeing what has changed and what has stayed the same and acknowledging and celebrating those differences.

Brittany Davis (at left) completes her interview with Sylvia and Austin Hulbert, sheep ranchers from Anderson Valley. (Photo by Mitch Mendosa)

Technology Was Key

Not just writing down but preserving the actual voices of the elders was a priority as they worked. The compact disc includes interview excerpts linked by music from local performers, including a stirring rendition of one of the elders singing "If I Were a Rich Man" at the local variety show.

Technology skills played a key role in the project. Students recorded all their interviews on digital audiotape (DAT), and they mastered the skills necessary to record, edit, and mass produce the compact disc. They learned to scan, enhance, and insert the historical and contemporary photographs they had collected for inclusion in the book. They spent hours word processing and laying out 107 pages of text, then digitally transmitted it to the printer. And when navigating the country roads of Anderson Valley made meeting difficult, they conferred with each other by videoconference and e-mail.

Time Proves Short

Sadly, over the last year, three of the elders interviewed have died. Though the deaths stunned the students, they also abruptly demonstrated to them the importance of their endeavor.

"It meant a lot for the youth of Anderson Valley to be at the funerals," Oral History Project student Nicole Breit commented. "We were pretty much the only young people there who knew these older people."

Kelsy Harnist added, "The death of some of the people we

California Oral History Project

Students and their elders gather at Lauren's Cafe to sign copies of their book, Voices of the Valley. (Photo by Deena Zarlin)

interviewed made me realize that it's important for us to get to know older people outside of the project, because they won't be around for much longer and their incredible stories will be lost."

"When students go out into their communities with the important task of collecting and preserving local history, it connects them with their neighbors in a meaningful way," observed Mitch Mendosa, the teacher-adviser for this project. "The students and I came away from each interview with a sense that something special had just occurred, that learning had taken on new meaning. This, in my mind, is one of the most powerful educational experiences we can offer our students."

Volume II of *Voices of the Valley* is under way, for release in spring 2000, and the students who worked on Volume I are serving as mentors to the new staff, instilling passion for the project and teaching the skills necessary to produce another book and CD.

To learn more about this project, see photos of the student historian team in action, and hear excerpts from the interviews, visit <*www.avusd.k12.ca.us/ncrcn/oral/index.html*>. For information on how to acquire a copy of the book and CD ($20 for both), e-mail Mitch Mendosa at <*mmendosa@avusd.k12.ca.us*> or call (707) 895-2199. Other projects in the North Coast Rural Challenge Network sites of Anderson Valley, Laytonville, Mendocino, and Point Arena appear on the Web at <*www.ncrcn. org*>.

> *“It's important for us to get to know older people, because they won't be around for much longer and their incredible stories will be lost.”*

Partnered with Local Photojournalists, Students Document

by Betsy Kroon

In an unusual photographic partnership with professional journalists, 76 students from six coastal Oregon high schools have documented the life and character of the Columbia Pacific community, an area that spans Oregon and Washington where the Columbia River meets the Pacific Ocean.

On May 4, 1999 the group fanned out into the region to record through some 2,500 pictures its people, economy, recreation, and environment. The resulting collection, "A Day in the Life of the Columbia Pacific," has been selected as part of the Library of Congress Local Legacies Project. It was published and distributed as a supplement to the sponsoring newspapers, and this fall half of its photographs are on display at the Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria.

The ambitious project, excerpts from which were also published on the Web (at <*http://www.tidepool.org/day*>), took place with the help of a planning grant from the Rural Challenge. Planners attribute its inspiration to a *Life* magazine project from the early 1970s, which recorded "A Day in the Life of America."

***Local artist Dave Poole works on a portrait as for St. Mary's Academy of Portland, a project he carries out every year for the school's reunions.* (Photo by Trish Hill, Seaside High School)**

Crossing the Divide

"We were impressed with the way these efforts seemed to capture both the diversity of their subjects as well as a commonality that bound them all together," says Ed Hunt, the editor of Tidepool.org, a community partner that helped coordinate the project. "We sought to tap that strategy for the diverse region of the Columbia Pacific, where people are divided, but have so much in common."

The Columbia River marks the border between Oregon and Washington in this region, and a bridge links the two states at Astoria, Oregon. The explorers Lewis and Clark ended their journey west here, and spent a wet and miserable winter on the coast before returning home. Astoria has the oldest United States post office west of the Rocky Mountains, and the area is rich in history, natural resources, and beauty. Astoria, Ilwaco, and Chinook are popular

'A Day in the Life of the Columbia-Pacific' Region

sport and commercial fishing ports and the region's timberlands are some of the most productive in the world. The area is also known for Willapa Bay oysters and the cranberry bogs on its Long Beach Peninsula.

The project's goal was not just to assemble a volume of pretty pictures, but to connect young people actively with the workings of their community.

"One does not learn how to be a productive citizen just by reading and listening," said Jon Graves, outreach specialist with Columbia Pacific Community Education Partners, another partner in the project. "We must help our young citizens be active participants in our community if we expect them to become good citizens when they get taller."

Newspapers Provide Mentors

The project gathered dozens of students from Astoria, Warrenton, Seaside, Naselle, and Ilwaco High Schools and from the Long Beach Alternative School to work with journalists from the *Daily Astorian* and the *Chinook Observer* newspapers. After a one-day workshop on photojournalism, led by the staff of the Astorian, they set out with donated film and disposable cameras to create a portrait of a larger community on both sides of the Columbia River.

The aspects of that community they sought to document included the arts and communications; business and management; natural resources; human resources; infrastructure and engineering; and health, safety, and recreation.

In the process they got a taste of how professional news people approach such an assignment, and the standards they use to determine quality in their work.

"I now look at things from many new perspectives," said Elizabeth Kuhn, a sophomore student who spent the day with a professional photographer. "I listened to him and I completely understood. I took a step up and gave up my old eyes."

Other students discovered talents that no one knew they had. "The best photos were not limited to students who had studied photography, or were even interested in it," observed editor Ed Hunt. The student who took the photograph used on the cover of the newspaper supplement, he said, "had never picked up a camera prior to this effort."

Bringing Rivals Together

Students said they not only gained a new appreciation of their community from the project, but also a sense of teamwork with students they had once only seen as athletic rivals. "One student told me it was the first such experience where she was not in a sports uniform and her coach and teachers were not helping her school figure out how to demoralize and beat the other school," noted Jon Graves. "She loved that it was several different schools with one objective."

Project sponsors are assembling complete instructions for other communities that wish to create projects recording "A Day in the Life," and will post them on the Tidepool.org website in the near future. They highly recommend the process as a way to strengthen and document local culture.

> *“The goal was not just to assemble a volume of pretty pictures, but to connect young people actively with the workings of their community.”*

"It is not often that the Columbia Pacific region sees itself as a community," Hunt noted. "This project did a good job of putting down on paper 'this is who we are.' We hope it will be around for years to come—a baseline for the great changes that lie ahead."

State Honors Go to Wisconsin Rural Partners

Congratulations to the Youth Press Project and New Paradigm Partners! They placed third and seventh, respectively, on Wisconsin's list of the State's Top Ten Rural Development Initiatives. The top 50 Rural Development Initiatives were highlighted, and the top ten received special recognition as part of the Governor's Rural Summit in August.

Regional Meetings Draw Diverse Partners to Share Their Rural Work

Rural Challenge partners in the Northwest, Upper Midwest, and Southwest gathered for regional meetings in June, July, and August. Naturally evolving from the strengths of past Rural Challenge annual gatherings, the regional meetings offered powerful opportunities for participants to learn from each other, gain new insights into the many ways schools and communities can grow stronger together, and inspire continued good work in rural places.

At each of the regional meetings, students played a large role—presenting, leading discussion groups, and freely sharing their experiences, hopes, and concerns. Celebrations of the richness of regional cultures also abounded. The Southwest gathering included a cowboy storyteller, Native American and Mexican dances and foods, and local art. In the Upper Midwest, participants met for a student-planned picnic and campfire and a Wisconsin style "fish-boil." In the Northwest, naturalists led hikes in the woods and participants enjoyed a picnic on the beach.

Students As Educators, Too

At the Northwest regional meeting (June 28–30), 90 participants, including 40 students, came together in northern California at the Sierra Club's Clair Tappaan Lodge, a rustic mountain setting on Donner Pass outside Truckee, California. Participating clusters included the North Coast Rural Challenge Network, the Mariposa School District, the Yuba Watershed Alliance, the Tillamook Education Consortium, and the Tlohon-nipts Alternative School in Long Beach, Washington.

"We enjoyed the place, got out in the environment, did valuable work and were in close company," one participant observed of the experience. And a student commented, "The most valuable thing I got out of my time here was realizing how much I have to offer and how willing and even eager people are to listen to me, as a student but also as a kind of educator." Adults also remarked on the value of "seeing our youth taking on such enormous challenges and sharing their pride and commitment," as one participant put it, adding, "It has reinstilled my faith and hope in our future."

Equity Is on the Table

The first Rural Challenge Upper Midwest Regional Gathering took place from July 13 to 15 in Ashland, Wisconsin, on the campus of Northwest Wisconsin Technical College. Fifty students and adults attended, representing the Center for School Change in Minnesota, New Paradigm Partners and the Wisconsin Rural Challenge in Wisconsin, and the Marquette-Alger Intermediate School District in Michigan.

Themes of equity and inclusion predominated, as students shared their concerns about the "sorting" mechanisms in schools and their hopes that schools will more equitably meet the needs of diverse learners. Students also expressed their strong desire to have more learning opportunities that take them outside the walls of the school and involve them as valuable resources in community building and revitalization.

The young people said they especially appreciated the opportunity to get together with peers from other places. In turn, many adults at the gathering remarked on the synergy, openness, and inclusivity these students displayed in all their activities.

From August 5 to 7, 115 students, parents, teachers, and school administrators gathered in Flagstaff, Arizona for the first Southwest Regional Meeting of the Rural Challenge. Participants from partner sites in Texas, California, the Navajo Nation, and New Mexico Pueblos were joined by potential partners from the Sangre de Cristo area of New Mexico and Northern Arizona.

The meeting brought together a strikingly diverse mix of students (30 percent), community members (20 percent), teachers (30 percent), and administrators or staff (20 percent). Half of those who came were Hispanic, 30 percent Native American, and 20 percent Anglo.

Students played a key part in at least 80 percent of the presentations. Many of these focused on technology, including presentations on video documentation, student-run community computer classes, technology as a community development tool, and student-directed networking to link distant schools and communities. All presentations were structured to encourage discussions about similar efforts at different sites, obstacles faced and ways to overcome them, and how to expand the work to more teachers and students.

Rural Challenge stewards Jose Colchado (Southwest), Sylvia Parker (Northwest), and Elaine Salinas (Upper Midwest) contributed to this article.

Policy Matters

Nebraska Alliance Helps Organize, Train Rural Advocates for Schools

by Marty Strange, Director
Rural Challenge Policy Program

Leading rural, farm, and education activists in Nebraska have launched a broad-based coalition to "build the capacity of rural people to fight for adequate, equitable, and quality rural education and community development as defined and developed by rural people themselves." The Nebraska Alliance for Rural Education, supported in part by a Rural Challenge policy grant, combines grassroots organizing, policy research, training for rural activists, and work with the news media.

Nebraska school politics has long centered on consolidation and finance issues. Rural areas have often been divided and conquered by one legislative measure after another, each creating a new set of victims and a more entrenched and vulnerable set of survivors among rural schools. The state still has the second largest number of rural school districts in the nation, but they are disappearing to consolidation faster than in any other state. This trend is prompted largely by changes in the funding formula and a recent constitutional amendment that caps property tax levies.

The Alliance's strategy rests on doing solid, empirical research to debunk the notion that small schools are unduly expensive to operate. One recent analysis, for example, showed that because larger districts have higher dropout rates, their "cost per graduate" is higher than for most smaller districts. Districts with 1,000 or more high school students spent less per pupil than smaller districts, but because of a 16 percent dropout rate they had higher costs per graduating student than each of the next four smaller size groupings. Only districts with fewer than 100 high school students had higher costs per graduate than the largest districts, but they graduated 97 percent of their students. The lowest cost per graduate was achieved by schools with between 300 and 599 students in high school. (More on this report appears in the October issue of *Rural Policy Matters*, on the web at <*www.ruraledu.org*>.)

Training Community Leaders

But while policy research is important, most of the Alliance's effort goes into grassroots organizing and training. It focuses on school board members and community volunteers in roughly 80 districts across the state where changes in the state aid formula have reduced base revenues by more than 10 percent since the 1997–98 school year. Training sessions aim both to sharpen leaders' ability to analyze rural education issues and to increase their effectiveness as advocates.

The Alliance is also exploring ways of working with urban school activists, many of whom have recently focused on getting the Omaha and Lincoln school boards to build smaller schools that are more neighborhood-based.

Although school finance issues must ultimately be won in the legislature, the Alliance is developing the legal theory to challenge the constitutionality of Nebraska's school finance system. Prior litigation in Nebraska has been unsuccessful, but the Alliance believes that equity litigation will gain strength from coupling a new equal protection clause, added only recently, with the state's education clause calling for a system of "common" schools.

Crossing Political Lines

Members of the Alliance include politically diverse organizations ranging from the more conservative Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation to the more liberal Nebraska Farmers Union. The Center for Rural Affairs, a nonprofit advocacy organization with a broad rural policy and development agenda, is a member, as are more education-centered rural groups including the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association, Friends of Rural Education, and the Nebraska School Finance Coalition. The Nebraska Community Foundation provides an administrative home for the Alliance, and the Nebraska Rural Development Commission actively supports its training and research components.

About half the schools that participate in the School at the Center, a Rural Challenge school improvement partner in Nebraska, are also active in the Alliance, according to School at the Center project director Jerry Hoffman. Many of these schools are among those adversely affected by recent changes in Nebraska's school finance formula.

New Website Gathers Rural Information on Partners, Policy

When looking for the Rural School and Community Trust over the Internet, it's now easier than ever to locate information about our programs, partners, and policy work. A new website at a new online address (<*www.ruraledu.org*>) enables Web users to access at a single location all information formerly found on the Rural Challenge's two separate sites for policy matters and grant partners. The new website features:

- Contact information for all Rural School and Community Trust partner projects, with brief descriptions of their work.
- Directories of Rural School and Community Trust staff, board members, and stewards.
- Complete text of the on-line symposium on public school standards that took place between November 1998 and February 1999.
- An archive of our newsletters, *Rural Matters* and *Rural Policy Matters*.
- Full-text versions of a host of policy-related documents.
- A great "links" page with access to Rural School and Community Trust partner websites, national education organizations, government information, and much more.
- A "Get Involved" section that allows viewers to sign up to receive newsletters or participate in online discussions.
- A "Partner of the Month" page featuring the work of the students, teachers, administrators, and community members in one of our partner sites.

Elisabeth (Lisa) Null will be developing and coordinating the site's content; she welcomes suggestions for news, links, and improvements. She can be reached through the Rural School and Community Trust's communications office at (202) 955-7177, or at <*lisa.null@ruraledu.org*>. Lisa replaces the wonderful team of students from the Minnesota New Country School who have so ably developed and run the site for the past three years. Evan Davis, Betsy Kroon, and Dave Krupinski graduated from MNCS and are attending college this year. A world of thanks to them for their contribution in bringing the Rural Challenge into cyberspace.

Development Update

continued from page 4

mistic that we will meet our ambitious fundraising goals once our final plan is in place. One president of a major corporation, who cherishes his rural roots, is interested in helping us in many ways, including introducing us to other corporate CEOs who have rural connections.

Other crucial support has come from a United States Senator, who has offered to co-host an informational session on Capitol Hill for key congressional staff members working on education issues. In addition, a major foundation in Pennsylvania is talking with us about a statewide effort there. We are also teaming up with national organizations focused on the arts and environmental conservation efforts. Finally, we have many site visits scheduled with potential funders this fall. We hope to be able to announce some major financial commitments by the next edition of *Rural Matters*.

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News from the Rural School and Community Trust **Winter 2000**

Schools serving their communities, communities serving their schools

Rural Matters Retires With This Issue

This issue of *Rural Matters* will be the last newsletter published under this name. Begun by the Annenberg Rural Challenge to share information and news among projects funded by the Annenberg grant, *Rural Matters* has been published quarterly since 1995. As the organization's grantmaking comes to an end, we will be inaugurating a new newsletter (its name as yet undetermined) that will focus on the capacity-building mission of the Rural School and Community Trust. We hope to publish more frequently, and to include the voices of

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$1.5 Million Lyndhurst Grant Will Help Rural Schools, Communities

The Lyndhurst Foundation of Chattanooga, Tennessee has granted $1.5 million in unrestricted support to the Rural School and Community Trust, the Trust's President Rachel Tompkins announced at the November Board of Trustees meeting.

The grant will support the Trust's two interconnected initiatives. It will lend strength to the capacity-building program that encourages rural schools and communities, and the people in them, to design and implement place-based learning. And it will bolster the Rural Trust's policy program, which investigates, illuminates, and improves the public policy environment of rural schools to be more supportive of those schools and their efforts to introduce place-based learning into their curricula.

By making this grant, the Lyndhurst Board of Trustees has made a major endorsement of the work completed, as well as the vision for the future of the organization as outlined in the Trust's strategic plan. One third of the award, or $500,000, is contingent upon the successful implementation of the proposal presented to the Lyndhurst board.

"We are excited and thankful for this vote of confidence in our work," said Tompkins. "This grant matches the Annenberg Foundation challenge grant and will help us expand our work to 1,000 schools and communities in the next three years. The Board, senior staff, stewards, evaluation team, project directors, teachers, and students that are currently part of this effort take great pride in this national recognition."

The Lyndhurst Foundation was established in 1938 by Thomas Cartter Lupton, a pioneer in the Coca-Cola Bottling business.

Commenting on the foundation's investment in rural schools and communities, Jack Murrah, President of the Lyndhurst Foundation, said: "Mr. Lupton had the foresight and wisdom to design

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On a recent visit to Rural Trust partner sites in South Dakota, AT&T President John Zeglis met with students at the Rutland community convenience store to brainstorm new business ideas for this business, which is run entirely by students. Zeglis has just joined the Rural Trust Board of Directors. (Left to right) Rural Trust President Rachel Tompkins, student and Rutland Store board member Annie Leighton, teacher Kathleen Trower, AT&T President John Zeglis, student and Rutland Store board member Carissa Trygstad. Story appears on page 5.

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Rural Trust Presence at National Rural Education Meeting

Students from three Colorado projects helped present "Rural Challenge: Stories from the Field" at the October NREA convention. Back row: Sarah Manser, Tim Devlin, Phillip Devlin, Aaron Schiel, Brisa Storey, Jesse Lowers, Eden Channell, Andy Beard. Middle row: Dessany Wiley, Tyra Walters, Matt Poulin, Hallie Shiner, Chelsey Reynolds, Kalvert Shiner, Kory Babcock, John Connett. Front row: Tucker Louthan, Jack Means, Kaleyne Gneiser, Leah Hendrickson, Danielle Iacovetto, Allegra Bonfiglio, Brandon Allen.

The young people of rural America and the Rural School and Community Trust were well represented at the 91st annual meeting of the National Rural Education Association (NREA) in Colorado Springs on October 13 to 17. The theme of this year's NREA conference was "Youth-Adult Partnerships in Rural America." A number of presentations by and about the Rural School and Community Trust were featured.

On Thursday, October 14 policy staff member Lorna Jimerson took part in a panel discussion titled "Rural Teacher Recruitment and Retention." Board member Belinda Laumbach offered a presentation on "Place-Based Education and Multicultural Education."

Rural School and Community Trust student work was showcased on Friday, October 15. Steward Sylvia Parker and student representatives from the three Rural Trust Colorado clusters told about and showed their work in "Rural Challenge: Stories from the Field." Thirteen students from Oak Creek Middle School in South Routt County (Yampa Valley Legacy Education Initiative) staged a segment from their "Peaks and Passages" community performances project on the history of Oak Creek. Six students from Idalia (Stewards of the High Plains) described some of their many projects; and four students from Crestone Charter School (in the Colorado Rural Charter Schools Network) described how their mentorship program works for them. Other presentations on Friday included "Small Towns, Big Dreams: Youth Making a Difference," by Teresa Schanzenbach and Jim Doolittle, Rural Trust partners in South Dakota, and "The Yampa Valley Legacy Education Initiative Process of Community Involvement," presented by Sara Wither, a University of Denver graduate student who has been working on evaluation of this Rural Trust program.

Rural Trust stewards Sylvia Parker and Alan DeYoung on Saturday presented "Rural Challenge: Reviving Communities and Reforming Schools by Working Together."

All the RSCT offerings provided valuable examples of the worth of partnerships between young people and adults in rural America.

rural matters

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Notes

from the National Office

I have been thinking often since becoming President of the Rural School and Community Trust about the best ways to build a national movement made up of incredibly diverse local work in schools and communities.

While thinking about this issue, I have been traveling—to Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Colorado, Maine, South Dakota, West Virginia—and becoming grounded in the work in various localities. I now carry in my mind's eye pictures of students, teachers, public officials, farmers, scientists, small town retail store owners, and university professors who are working to enlarge student learning and improve community life.

In Birmingham, I attended the Southeast meeting of project directors of Annenberg-funded sites and others concerned with rural schools. As part of the meeting we visited the Civil Rights Museum, where the voices and pictures and things (the burned out bus from the Freedom Ride) moved me to think about the hard struggles upon which our work builds in that region. I was thankful to be there in the company of black and white southerners who work every day to end the remaining vestiges of racial stereotyping and segregation.

Later in September, I spent some time on the Mississippi Delta and went to church with Mayor Unita Blackwell of Mayersville, Mississippi, one of the heroines of those civil rights battles. She paused outside the church and said, "This is where I decided to go and register to vote in 1963." I thought about the difference that brave decision and hundreds like it made for our democracy. After church, the Mayor and I talked about linking her programs for young people in her town with our work in the Delta.

I stood on the banks of the Yampa River with officials from the Department of Wildlife, other state and federal officials, geologists, ranchers, and ninth-grade teachers and students from Steamboat Springs High School and discussed developing the management plan for a new wildlife area along the river. Working with mentors, eighty students in teams of four will develop the options, hold public hearings, and present the proposed plan to state officials in the spring. The work they are doing has been carefully linked back to the state standards for learning.

With a second-grade class in Steamboat, I examined the aspen tree outside the door and pondered changes brought by the seasons. Learning to observe very carefully, documenting the observations in writing, raising questions about the meaning of what we saw, developing theories to answer the questions, seeking resources in books and on the Internet were all part of this simple but profound exercise for seven-year-old children.

On Cobscot Bay, as far down east in Maine as one can go, I inspected mussel rafts with Lubec High School students who are working to understand the potential and the challenges of aquaculture in a place where fishing has formed the life blood of the economy. Across the Bay in Eastport, technology students presented the results of a study of currents, proving that water continuously circulates within the bay. These young people are learning science, math, computer problem solving, history, and economics while providing critical information for planning for the future of their region.

In Rutland, South Dakota, the Board of Directors (juniors and seniors at Rutland High), of the Rutland Convenience Store, built and managed by a school community team, discussed with new Rural Trust Board member John Zeglis, the President of AT&T, their objec-

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Charter School Laws Help Keep Rural Schools Open

by Ginny Jaramillo

Most people think of charter schools as "splinter schools" formed by small groups of parents or teachers wanting to try something different from what's being offered in the local public schools —typically, an urban attempt to create "school choice." It's hard to imagine, in fact, that charter laws were ever written with small rural communities in mind. In Colorado one of the authors of the state charter school law recently remarked about the "surprising" result of charter laws in some of the most remote rural communities of the state.

He was talking about the widely scattered communities that belong to the Colorado Rural Charter Schools Network. Places hard to find on a map—Marble, Guffey, Crestone, McElmo Canyon, Paradox Valley—have found a way to open or re-open their local schools using the state's charter law. The Colorado law makes it possible for groups of people to apply to their school district for the right to open a school and govern it with their own charter board. It also states that if a school district owns a building that is not being used, then the chartering community can use the building at no cost if it is brought up to state building codes.

The door has opened for small rural communities throughout the state to re-open and run their own schools. The Colorado Rural Charter Schools Network is working hard to answer the requests for support of place-based curriculum, multi-age instruction, and community stewardship that are coming from these tiny towns.

What began as a network of five rural charter schools has now expanded to seven schools that are in operation in Colorado and three more that are in the process of applying for charters. Utah, with a charter law just passed this past year, recently added two potential rural network communities, one near Park City and one south of Moab. A Nebraska group met informally in October with members of the Colorado network to discuss the potential of a Nebraska charter law to help rural communities in that state reclaim their schools. It is clear that the story of rural charter schools is just beginning, and rural school de-consolidation may be the moral of the story.

Ginny Jaramillo is a Board Member of the Rural School and Community Trust and the Project Director of the Colorado Rural Charter School Network.

Project Directors Meet in Chicago, Plan Future Directions

Fifty-three Rural School and Community Trust project directors gathered November 7 and 8 in Chicago to learn from one another and share the work they are doing in Rural Trust programs across the country. The packed agenda focused on strengthening and sustaining the work begun in 700 schools and communities over the past four years.

President Rachel Tompkins painted a picture of the future direction of the Rural Trust, and project directors gave their input to the plans for capacity building and policy work. Marty Strange, the Trust's Policy Director, spoke about the work that the policy staff is undertaking.

Each project brought materials and successful strategies to share. Work in small groups provided opportunities to assist each other with dilemmas encountered along the way. A self-assessment rubric drafted by the evaluation staff and the stewards provided structure for the small group sharing.

Sustaining the work after Annenberg grant money is gone was an important topic at this meeting. The group considered the question of sustainability using three different dimensions: first, how to position themselves to identify and receive additional resources; second, how to realign current resources to maximize support for the work; and third, how to align school goals and curriculum with the social, environmental, and economic concerns of the community.

Project Directors also met in regional groups to discuss their future activities on that level. All agreed that regional meetings and work will evolve both to suit the needs of the people already working in that region and those of their neighbors who would like to join this movement.

Lyndhurst Grants $1.5M To Help Rural Trust Work

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a charter that enabled the foundation to adapt to changing times and respond to unique opportunities. The Rural School and Community Trust is both a timely initiative and an extraordinary opportunity for investing in education and community life in America, two of our nation's greatest challenges."

Rural Matters Retires

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students, teachers, and community members who are carrying out the work of place-based education across the country. We welcome your ideas as we plan this new publication, scheduled to first appear in early 2000. Contact Kathy Westra, Director of Communications, at (202) 955-7177 or by e-mail at kathy.westra@ruraledu.org.

A Rural Illinois Native, AT&T President John Zeglis Joins Rural Trust Board

John D. Zeglis, born and raised in rural Momence, Illinois, and currently president and a director of AT&T, was elected to the Rural School and Community Trust's Board of Trustees at the board's November meeting in Chicago.

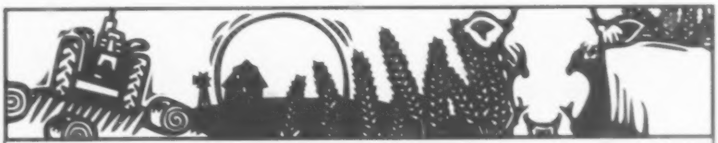
"We are thrilled that someone of John Zeglis's stature and experience is willing to devote his time, energy, and leadership skills to the work of the Trust," said Jack Murrah, chairman of the Board. "His rural roots, combined with his experience as president of a major corporation, will be invaluable as we build on our work in rural America."

Eager to be an active Board member, Zeglis already has visited Rural Trust partners in Howard and Rutland, South Dakota. Accompanied by president Rachel Tompkins and Jack Hills of the development office, he engaged the students who run the community store in Rutland in a lively discussion, and helped brainstorm ideas for improving the student-run business venture.

Zeglis, who still treasures his rural Illinois upbringing, spent his undergraduate years at the University of Illinois, and was a 1972 magna cum laude graduate of Harvard Law School. He was a senior editor of the Harvard Law Review and won a Knox Memorial Fellowship for a year of postgraduate study in law and economics in Europe.

He began his career in law in 1973 as an associate with Sidley & Austin, becoming a partner in the firm in 1978. He joined AT&T as a corporate vice president in January 1984, and was named AT&T's general counsel in 1986. While retaining that title he served in a series of executive assignments with increasing responsibility before being elected vice chairman in June 1997, and president later that year.

Zeglis is a member of the American Bar Association and state and local bar associations and professional groups, and is active in volunteer groups supporting education. He is chairman of the board of trustees of George Washington University, and serves on a number of other university, nonprofit, and business organization boards. He is a director of the Helmerich and Payne Corporation in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the Illinova Corporation in Decatur, Illinois, and the Sara Lee Corporation in Chicago.



Mark Your Calendars

March 27–28, 2000	Rural School and Community Trust Student Extravaganza in Kearney, Nebraska. For information, contact Kami Marsh at (308) 728-3241.
June 23–25, 2000	Bread Loaf's National Conference, "Teaching in Rural Schools." For information, contact the Bread Loaf School of English at (802) 443-5418.

Raising Rural Voices to Share the Power of Place

by Laura Paradise

During the past three years, six rural National Writing Project sites have focused on the unique challenges of teaching in rural communities. With funding from the Annenberg Rural Challenge, "Rural Voices, Country Schools" (RVCS) consists of six teams of up to eight teacher researchers at sites in Arizona, Louisiana, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Washington. Launched to address problems of isolation, economic decline, and school closings, the network brings together sites that have created dynamic strategies for fostering community involvement in student learning and school reform.

> *In six states, teams of teachers are shaping new strategies to counter isolation, economic decline, and school closings.*

Since 1997, RVCS sites have been documenting writing practices and reaching out to involve community members as teachers and learners. The National Writing Project's objective under the Annenberg Challenge was not only to improve literacy but ultimately to reverse the "deficit model" of rural self-image by tapping the advantages of being small and unique places. The network's efforts have raised a chorus of rural voices that celebrate the vitality and diversity of rural communities. The wealth of published writing—in print, audio, and Internet—demonstrates the power and excitement of inviting communities into the classroom, and expanding learning activities into the community.

Evoking Place-Based Writing

From the outset of the Rural Challenge, RVCS sites engaged in a dialogue asking "Where am I from?" and developing learning strategies that encourage place-based inquiry and reflection. Sites agree that a pedagogy of place creates rich soil for growing healthy students and strong communities. From cornfield to coal mine, classroom to coffee shop, RVCS sites illuminated dynamic pictures of rural life. At every site, teachers organized public forums where students and others shared place-based writing. Sites produced written anthologies, hosted poetry cafes, and held readings at community centers, retirement homes and other venues. Students took part in authentic, real-world learning activities that expanded their sense of community: they collected oral histories, tested water quality samples, interviewed local businesses and helped campaign to pass a school bond.

Rural Voices, County Schools demonstrated that sense of place engages many community voices, and provides a forum to honor and recognize both the uniqueness and diversity of rural communities. But more than that, place-based learning adds new dimensions to teaching methods and community engagement. A virtual institute, sites made use of technology to connect "key" pen pals, publish chat books of student work, conduct Internet-based in-service workshops, and convey Powerpoint slide presentations, to name a few.

"Rural Voices Radio" is another product of RVCS. With readings by Nebraska students and teachers, radio listeners experienced the smells of prairie grasses and tractor fuel, the thundering clap of an incoming storm, the silence of drought, as well as learning the story of Rural Voices, Country Schools and its focus on place-inspired writing. All six RVCS sites will produce radio pieces sharing their sense of place, with the technical production expertise of Deborah Begel.

Bridging School, Community

RVCS has built bridges within communities and across networks in many forms and forums. South central Pennsylvania designed and built a museum exhibit on literacy and language learning; Third Coast Michigan published "Home and other Places" and brought professional writers into their classrooms; Louisiana offered free in-service writing workshops to its most rural parish; Nebraska held theme-based three-week rural institutes and extended invitations to community members; Arizona created web-based teaching models for students and teachers; and Washington developed a video showing how teachers manage new standards in the classroom.

The impact of RVCS won't stop, even though the Rural Challenge grant is ending. The many articulate voices from the six sites—Michigan, Arizona, Nebraska, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, and Washington—are a thriving network, creating learning communities with a deeper understanding of how education contributes to community health and viability.

New Guidebook on Assessment Offers Rural Educators Alternatives

A new monograph on student assessment, prepared for the Rural School and Community Trust by its Harvard University research and evaluation team, offers dozens of alternatives to standardized tests, along with a critique of one-size-fits-all testing practices.

The 73-page booklet focuses on assessment that is rooted in actual work over time, mostly collected in portfolios and evaluated using various kinds of rubrics. It draws widely on the work of respected educational experts from Fred Newmann to Grant Wiggins, and uses examples from school people from Maine to California, Vermont to Tennessee. It gives a concise and cogent overview of how to design and use alternative assessments in a number of disciplines and at various grade levels. And it provides advice on how schools might use this approach in accounting to the wider public.

Harvard professor Vito Perrone, who heads the evaluation team, notes that the Rural Trust project directors requested such a book because teachers and schools needed information about assessments better suited to place-based curriculum than are most off-the-shelf tests. "Those in Rural Trust schools must argue for, and make use of, assessment practices that are more potent, that support their students and the teaching-learning exchange more productively, that inform their local communities more fully," he asserts.

Copies of the monograph may be had through the Rural Trust's Washington office. (See page 2 for contact information.)

Policy Matters

Barriers to Place-based Education

by John Eckman

The Rural School and Community Trust recently hosted an open electronic forum to discuss "Barriers to Place-Based Education." The 86 participants—teachers, community members, administrators, researchers, nonprofit managers, and academics—brought perspectives from 31 states and beyond. They worked together to identify regulatory barriers, to articulate why these constraints make it more difficult for rural schools to pursue place-based initiatives, and to suggest alternatives based on their experiences. You can read the full text of this discussion and keep up with other on-line events by visiting our website at www.ruraledu.org frequently and looking at "What's New."

While each of the diverse communities represented by the on-line group faces its own unique challenges, the participants' discussion focused on four common barriers: narrowly interpreted standards, lack of resources, limited planning time, and community and professional resistance to change.

What emerged from this discussion are some universal conditions that can help create an environment where place-based education can be an effective learning process. They are:

Grassroots efforts, not new formal policies. Participants agreed that place-based efforts should grow locally, not as a result of "top-down" policy decrees. As Michael Umphrey of Montana wrote, "When you focus people on work that they can do within existing structures, and get them busy doing the work, they invent cultural practices that begin solving problems."

Schools as community facilities. Over time, schools have come to be viewed solely as instructional sites rather than as community facilities. By reintroducing the concept of schools as spaces for community functions, the community is more likely to become involved in their local schools.

> *“On-line discussion is a first step in hearing your policy concerns.”*

Teachers as both professionals and community members. More teachers need to recognize that being a true professional means being sensitive to and connected with local culture, traditions, resources, and issues.

The power of stories. Tell success stories of learning in action to parents, teachers, students, community members, policy-makers, and researchers. Let the work speak for itself.

This discussion has just started the conversation about barriers. If you have specific policy hurdles you see from the perspective of your school or community, please let us know. Write us at barriers@ruraledu.org or give a call to the Rural Trust Policy Program office at (802)728-5899.

Notes

from the National Office

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tives for improving the business. The store is a gas station, snack shop, grocery store, video rental, pool hall, game room, after-school hangout, and community meeting center. These students tested out their ideas and got some advice about ways to use the Internet and e-commerce to expand beyond the items in the store and to overcome the reluctance of vendors to come to their small town.

Returning from these travels, I have been settling into an office in Washington, D.C., walking to work each morning past statues for an admiral (Dupont), a general (McClellan), and a poet (Longfellow). Part of my job here is to raise the visibility of rural schools and communities in national conversations; to convey to national education organizations and policymakers the value of place-based education, small schools, and the connections between school and community; and to build financial support for our work.

We have a great opportunity for visibility and impact as a result of recent announcements from the Department of Education. Secretary Riley spoke in favor of small multipurpose schools acting as centers for their communities. He told his listeners they could find examples of this in rural schools and communities that have resisted consolidation. Following his remarks, we wrote to him and asked for a meeting to discuss our shared interest in these ideas. We are meeting with the Under Secretary and other officials early in December, at which time we will share our soon to be released research on the benefits of small schools for poor children and talk about a planned national meeting on rural school facilities. We will also share many good examples of rural schools with the Secretary. Don't be surprised to hear about your schools and communities in future speeches by the Secretary.

The lessons I take from these few weeks are that it is vitally important for me to keep immersing myself in the places where the work is done. But it is also increasingly important to communicate the ideas and tell the stories to national audiences. As these ideas develop currency, it should be easier to connect schools and communities, to implement place-based curriculum ideas, and to change policy in favor of small rural schools.

—Rachel Tompkins, President

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